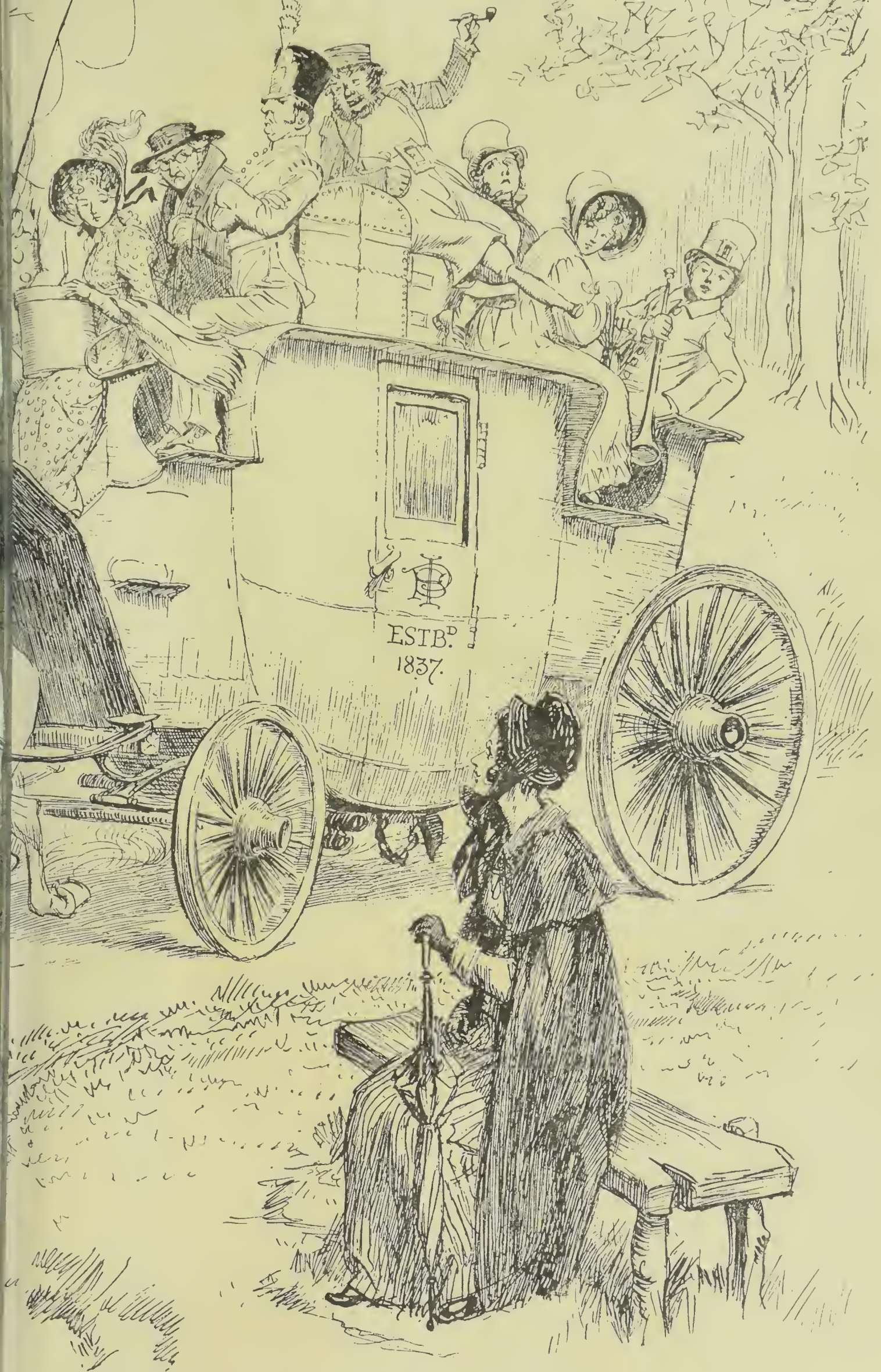






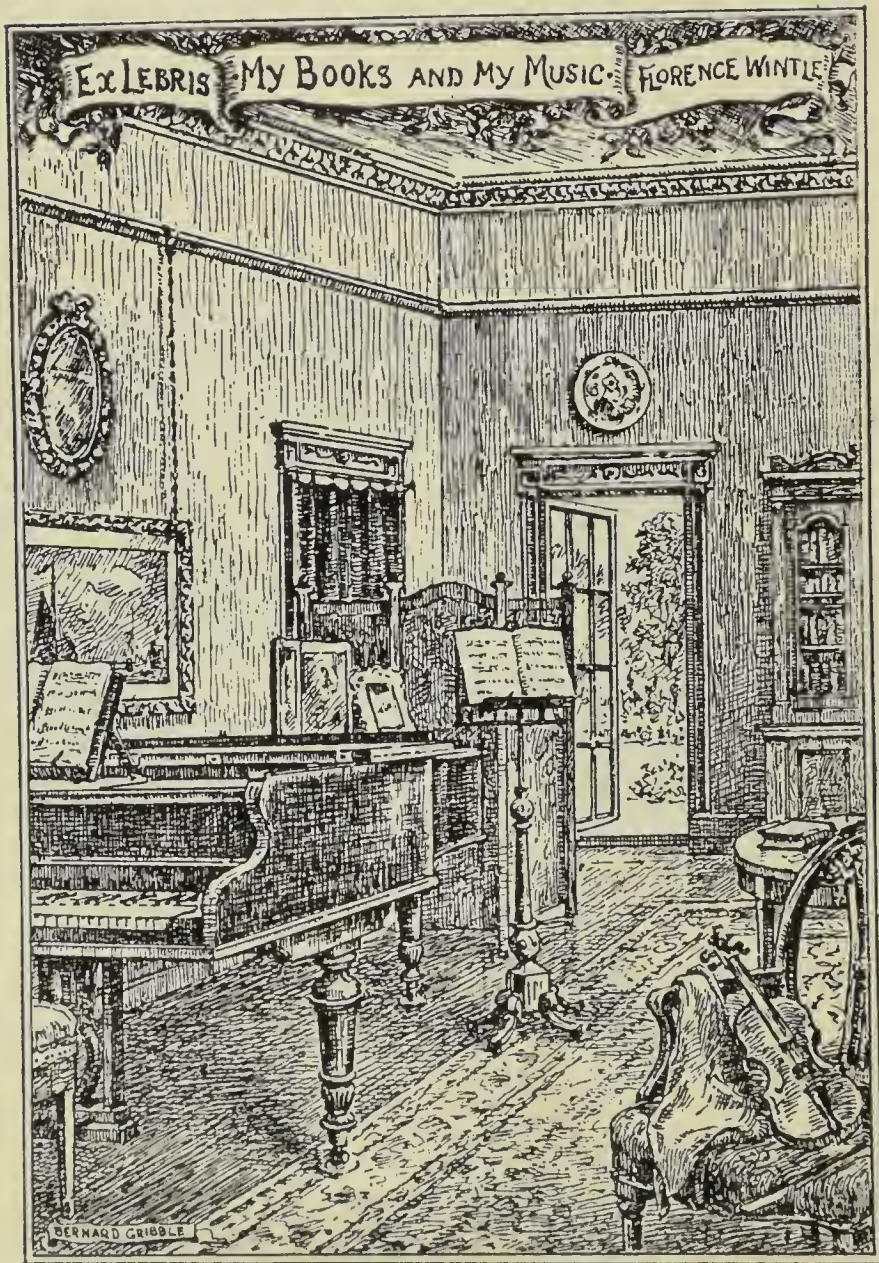
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Scottish provident widow to join his fortunate passengers. *By Hugh Thomson*















MISS HARDCASTLE AND CHARLES MARLOW:

“You were going to observe, Sir?”

*From “She Stoops to Conquer,” by Oliver Goldsmith  
(Hodder & Stoughton, 1912)*

*The drawing for this plate is here reproduced with the gracious approval of  
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HUGH THOMSON

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# HUGH THOMSON

*HIS ART HIS LETTERS  
HIS HUMOUR AND  
HIS CHARM*

*BY*

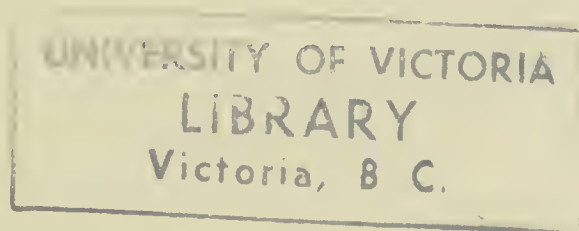
*M. H. SPIELMANN*

*and*

*WALTER JERROLD*

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1931



Printed in Great Britain



THIS BOOK  
A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF  
HUGH THOMSON  
IS DEDICATED  
TO  
JESSIE NAISMITH THOMSON  
HIS DEVOTED WIFE

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasing duty to express acknowledgements to those who have so cordially given their aid in making this record as complete, and the portrait as true, as may here be claimed—pleasing and sad as well, for during the period in which the book has been on the way several of the kindly helpers have passed away. Chief of these is my friend and collaborator, Walter Jerrold, who brought into proper form much of the biographical material of the book supplied, but was unhappily called away before it could be finally dealt with. Then Austin Dobson (through his son, Mr. Alban Dobson—whose generous assistance has been of the utmost value) made it possible for us to dwell effectively on that charming collaboration which has been called the “ideal partnership” of the distinguished poet and the not less eminent illustrator. John Vinycomb, M.R.I.A., the man on whose early teaching and encouragement Hugh’s art career was founded; Frank Frankfort Moore, the novelist, who as writer in a northern Irish journal, was the first art-critic to discover the young man’s promise; Mrs. J. Comyns Carr, who aided her husband in cheering the life of the welcome immigrant into London; O. Pelly Dick, of the Board of Trade, who along with Mr. A. G. Chuter succeeded in making easier the War years at a time when Hugh worked under him; Richard Whiteing, the novelist and fellow-Fireside Clubman; the admirable and devoted friend the Rt. Hon. William Houston Dodd—all have passed away before these pages could be seen in print; and, chief of all, in so far as he is witness to Hugh Thomson’s genius, William Pitcher (better known until a few years since as “C. Wilhelm”), whose masterly estimate of Thomson’s work viewed as a whole appears in these pages.

From Hugh’s own family and from the circle of the friends of his youth we have received most valued assistance, especially in regard to Hugh’s early life. To Mrs. Hugh Thomson, and to her son, Mr. John Thomson, we owe infinitely more than can here be expressed, for their untiring and endless help, including the loan alike of books and of pictures, has been richest in result in manifold ways. Mr. Richard Thomson, brother, and Mr. Robert Hunter, cousin, and Mr. J. W. Carey (with his remarkable diary) and Mr. J. Macneill, friends of Hugh’s youth and age, have made it possible to set forth a good account of his development. Mr. J. P. Collins, Mr. Stephen Gwynn, and Mr. F. J. Harvey Darton, authors whom Hugh illustrated, have all added their judgement upon him, and Sir James Barrie has shown how, in a flash, he could dis-

sect the character of a visitor; while Sir Bernard Partridge (whose exquisite artistry was regarded by Hugh with boundless admiration and respect) has briefly but keenly appraised the artist and his work. In addition we offer our thanks to Mr. George Macmillan, Mr. A. G. Chuter, Mr. A. G. Gilbert, Mr. Arthur Fish, Mr. Hugh Allen, and Mr. W. S. Allen; and in greatest measure to Sir Frederick Macmillan, whose kindness and invariable readiness to offer every assistance in his power has been typical of him who did so much to establish the fame of Hugh Thomson and assure his career. Special gratitude is also due to Mr. Frederic Whyte, who, on the practical side of the book, rendered me invaluable assistance. Sincere acknowledgement must be made, also, to Lady (Leonard) Cohen for her help and interest, to Sir Herbert Maxwell, Bart., P.C., to Mr. Carmichael Thomas, Mr. James F. Sullivan, to Mr. Oliver Brown and Mr. Cecil L. Phillips (both of The Leicester Galleries), and to Mrs. Constance Chapman.

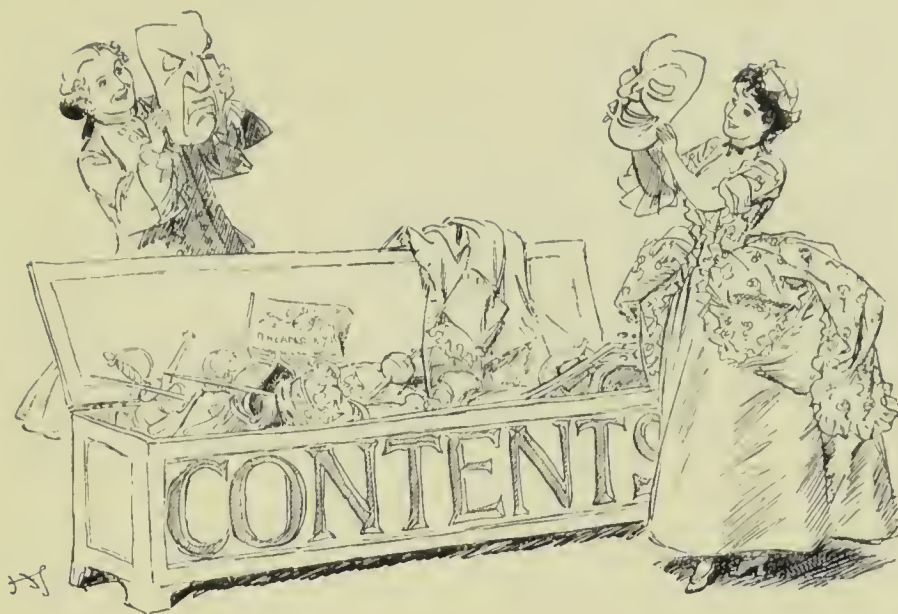
We would also point out here our indebtedness to all the Publishers who have so willingly and generously helped with illustrations in the book, as indicated at length beneath those actual reproductions and in the Bibliography.

Her Majesty the Queen has graciously lent for reproduction the illustration to *She Stoops to Conquer* which forms the Frontispiece to the present volume; to her are gratefully tendered our own, and our readers', most respectful thanks. To Lady Croft we are indebted for her kind consent to include the drawing of Hester Prynne, "at the Dusky Mirror", and to the Lady Swaythling for permission to present the Programme for one of her concert evenings.





The book-plate of Mr. William E. F. Macmillan



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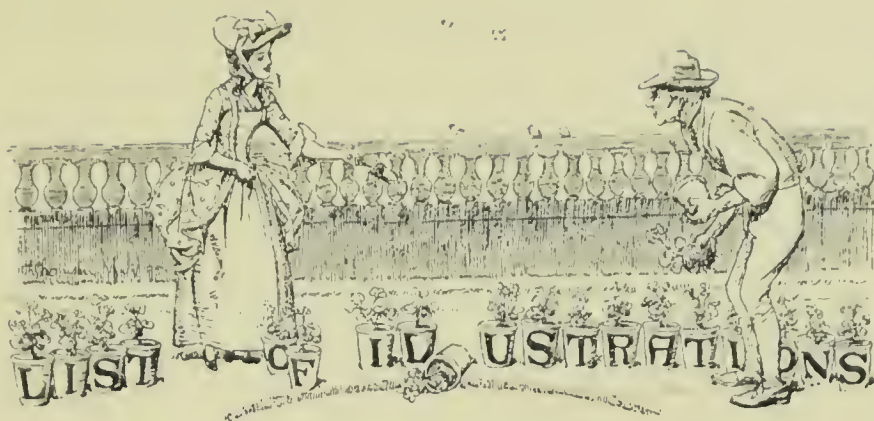
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*Also nine Initial Letters to chapters  
and a reproduction of a  
Coaching Scene on the  
end papers*



## A WORD WITH YOU

BY WAY OF

## INTRODUCTION

HERE at length is set before you the Life of Hugh Thomson. You have in it a book that deals with the life of an artist, a man of strong character and high principle, delicate in his happy humour and gentle in his kindness, and withal in heart and in demeanour modest.

It is a Memoir in which life and action tell their own full tale without frequent introduction of art-criticism or technical estimate to appraise our subject's works one by one. These, as we recall them, justify themselves in accordance with the impression they are known to have made upon the world that welcomed them. It is, in brief, a Biography rather than a disquisition, and in it the interested reader will watch the self-drawn development without being troubled on our part by the "assessment and censorious adjudication" of a past day. He will see how the artist made his way along his appointed

The Headpiece is from a drawing contributed by Hugh Thomson to a private publication.



path step by step; and it is these facts alone—his successes and disappointments, and later on his physical sufferings, and how he met them all, with his own delightful comments in his letters—that give all the life that is imparted to the tale we have to tell.

The puzzle would appear to be, how an Irish youth walked, as it were, quietly out of the linen manufacturer's in Coleraine straight into the English Eighteenth Century—as if he were of it, with all its elegance and its distinction, and above all its graceful Englishness. In spite of the absolute candour which governs these pages, the puzzle is here not entirely solved: it is as though we had seen a conjurer's trick and yet could not detect the secret of the sleight-of-hand.

A greater wonder still is the range of Hugh Thomson's observation—of men and women of every rank in life, from the highest loveliness and breeding to the lowest, most abysmal depravity, reflecting on their faces with a mere touch of the pen the most delicate variations of the most subtle expressions: and not on their faces only, but in their attitudes, and indicated in the suggested movement of their limbs. Of animals as well, whether horses of any and every sort and breed—in action or at rest—or cattle and sheep, or dogs and cats, or even monkeys, or birds, or poultry—and the rest: he makes them all live for us, usually imparting here or there a touch of humour that makes us laugh with him, as we delight at the apparent ease with which he has thrown an idea lightly on the page just to please us. We see nothing of his sense of doubt tormenting him, of his severe self-examination as to whether the realisation of his fancy is really true and good enough to place before his publisher and his public. And all because he had had no regular art training and trusted only to his own keen memory and amazing observation, employing no model and studying no anatomy. No wonder that Mrs. E. A. Abbey told me, speaking of her distinguished husband, "I don't think Ned took much interest in Hugh Thomson and his work",

for, though Abbey was indeed a master in his art, he lacked much of Thomson's gift. If you would vouch for it, look from Abbey's *She Stoops to Conquer* to Hugh's—and see how quiet is your undoubted respect and admiration for Ned's, yet how lively are your delight and laughter at the brilliant humour and truthful humanity of the people whom Hugh brings to life before us.

Look further, and see his Landscape, so truly realised and touched in, we judge, because his chief love was in it. Then turn to his architecture and see how perfectly it is set before us, even in examples of the most complicated form. And then again—his shipping: it is true he did not produce many of these, but those that there are seem to reflect an intimate knowledge and a perfect touch. Everyday life attracted him but little and he made no great mark at it, unless it had humour or its opposite, misery, pitiable or hateful. But, after all, the Eighteenth Century, as we shall see, inspired him best, and he followed Austin Dobson—as Dobson followed Hume and Richardson and Boswell—in the special phases of life and manners to which his art was devoted. He may seldom have given us the London revealed by Fielding and Hogarth, with its vice and sheer brutality, but when, under direction, he dealt with the subject he, perhaps unconsciously in part, softened even villainy with his sense of humanity, sometimes making it almost genial—but never quite.

To see Hugh Thomson at his happiest ease was to see him almost alone with those he loved best, in the country-fields in the spring-time, his voice subdued as he drank in Nature's loveliness. This phase of his character was beautifully brought home to me by Mrs. Hugh Thomson when she wrote of Hugh's favourite poem—that by Thomas Nash, "Spring, the sweet Spring":

Spring, the sweete spring, is the yeres pleasant King,  
Then bloomes eche thing, then maydes daunce in a ring,  
Cold doeth not sting, the pretty birds doe sing,  
Cuckow, iugge, iugge, pu we, to witta woo.

The Palme and May make countrey houses gay,  
 Lambs friske and play, the Shepherds pype all day,  
 And we heare aye birds tune this merry lay,  
 Cuckow, iugge, iugge, pu we, to witta woo.

The fields breathe sweete, the dayzies kisse our feete,  
 Young louers meete, old wiues a sunning sit;  
 In euery streete, these tunes our eares doe greete,  
 Cuckow, iugge, iugge, pu we, to witta woo.  
 Spring, the sweete spring.<sup>1</sup>

“Hugh knew it by heart,” writes Mrs. Thomson, “and as he and I walked out on early spring days he used to repeat it in such low tender tones, almost half to himself. I can hear his voice now, and the way he lingered lovingly over ‘The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet’. The spring was his *time of the year*. He roamed about the little outlying hamlets at Littlehampton, or Bexhill, or Rye, or wherever it might be, revelling in all the signs of the oncoming spring, and while we lived at Seaford he used to wander about the fields or downs, listening on the Sunday morning to the bleating of the lambs and the tinkling of the sheep-bells, with everything else quiet around us. And in the late spring evenings, almost in the twilight, we went over to the little down by Bishopstone Manor, and almost level with the tops of the trees there, watched the rooks, and listened to their cawing as they settled into their nests for the night. The restfulness and peace of it all was inexpressibly soothing to Hugh.”

In this sweet repose we leave him now, while we proceed to make what may be perhaps a revelation, so that the reader may see of what multitudinous details an illustrator’s life and life-work are composed if (as Austin Dobson wrote in one of the sets of verses he dedicated to Hugh) he would dwell “in the megaphone of Fame”.

M. H. SPIELMANN

<sup>1</sup> In Nash’s *Pleasant Comedie, called Symmers last will and Testament*, wherein Ver (Spring) and his “trayne” enter, suitably arrayed, and sing “The Song”—written in 1592 and published in 1600.

[As reprinted for A. H. Bullen, 1905, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*. Edited by Ronald B. McKerrow. Vol. iii.]







*Photo: Hoppe*

HUGH THOMSON IN 1912

Born 1st of June 1860. Died 7th of May 1920

# HUGH THOMSON

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY YEARS IN IRELAND

1860-1883



COLERAINE, Co. Derry, long celebrated for its “Beautiful Kitty”, for its special manufacture of fine Irish linen, for its sea-fishery, and its whisky, gained fresh title to fame by the birth there, on June 1, 1860, of Hugh Thomson. The small town, situated on one of the finest reaches of the beautiful river Bann, is credited with evidence of culture far superior to that of neighbouring towns owing to the enlightened policy in respect of building and endowing schools, and so forth, of the London merchants who have been its landlords since the seventeenth century.

A house in Church Street, since demolished, was Hugh Thomson’s birthplace and childhood’s home. He was the eldest of the three children of John Thomson, third son of a farmer of Ballygobbin near Ballymoney, close to the Antrim border; the family, it is believed, hailed originally from the Scottish Border country. John Thomson (“a stout man, but very athletic, and unaffected in speech and manner”) had gone into business and married Catherine Andrews, of Coleraine; her name also suggests more or less recent Scottish ancestry. The three children of that marriage who grew up were Hugh, the subject of this memoir, Richard, who was two years

The Initial letter to this chapter is from *Peg Woffington*, published by George Allen in 1899.

younger, and Mary. There were two other sons, on whom their father bestowed in succession the names of William Ewart Gladstone Thomson, as the expression of his passionate admiration for the statesman, but neither of the children survived for many weeks.

As a small child Hugh was often a delighted visitor to his uncles at the farm at Ballygobbin—"our ancestral hall", as he playfully described it in later years; and there, as well as at the old farmsteads at Dundooan, nearer to Coleraine, these old thatched farmhouses, wherein dwelt kindly, gentle kinsfolk, and the "characters" in the way of farm hands, formed an important background to the early life of the artist. When school age came the boy was sent to the Coleraine Model School, where, under the headmastership of James Bresland, a man of high character and capacity, a sound elementary education was imparted; the subjects taught being the "three R's", geography, and singing, with geometry, elementary French, and science as "extras". The pupils being of mixed religious denominations, no history of any kind was taught. Hugh's exercise-books and the fly-leaves of all his lesson-books, says his brother, were pencilled over with jottings of horses and dogs and men and ships. Certain "humdrum lessons in perspective drawing" constituted the whole of his art education during boyhood.

Before Hugh left school, at fourteen years of age, his mother died, after a long illness, in 1871. After this sad event the family removed from Church Street to Clifton Terrace on the Portrush Road—a particularly pleasant part of Coleraine, notable for a sunny aspect and a beautiful outlook over the Bann, which thereabouts is a lovely tidal river.

Two or three years after his wife's death John Thomson married again, his second wife being Maria Lennox, a widow with one son.<sup>1</sup> There were no children of the second marriage, and John Thomson's new wife was ever a loving mother to her step-children. After his remarriage the father moved to

<sup>1</sup> The late Dr. James Lennox, of the Manor House, Kilrea, Co. Derry.



Kilrea, on the hills above the Bann valley, about fourteen miles south of Coleraine, where he started a small drapery business. Later, leaving his wife in charge, he took a fresh position in Coleraine to hasten the paying of liabilities incurred during a long period of inaction caused by illness. It was at Clifton Terrace, says his brother Richard, that Hugh "painted his first great *tour de force*—a picture of a soldier's horse standing in an archway having a gossip with a dog of the mastiff type. I remember father's pleasure in the masterpiece."

On the removal to Kilrea, about 1876, Hugh remained in lodgings in Coleraine, having been apprenticed to a firm of linen manufacturers in the town, Messrs. E. Gribbon & Sons. It was no special zeal for the great Ulster industry that led to the lad's apprenticeship—nothing more than taking the particular opportunity that offered. As a good handwriting appeared to have been the chief accomplishment acquired at the Model School, clerical work seemed clearly to be indicated.

Hugh had already given many indications of his individual bent, but it was little likely that such indications should have suggested to his family any possibility of their utilisation for the making of a career. "One of my earliest delights", he said, recalling his childhood, "was to look at some old copies of the *Dublin Penny Magazine*, a very curious old production in which were some rude woodcuts of Hogarth's well-known pictures. . . . The use I made of it was to make drawings of animals on its pages." And again: "As a little fellow I used to be very fond of doing very bad drawings of setters and pointers". The taste for drawing, early displayed, proved to be a persistent one. He passed on to copying the work of various artists—he specifically mentions Fred Barnard and Charles Green<sup>1</sup>—in something like an instinctive desire to obtain mastery of the pencil. It can have been with little enthusiasm that he found himself bound to the linen business, and much of his spare time was devoted to drawing and painting. The earliest family recollections—of his brother and

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Barnard (1846–96); Charles Green, R.I. (1840–98).



his cousin—are of this devotion to pencil and paint. Richard Thomson says that one of his earliest recollections is of Hugh “seated at the parlour table surrounded by an interested circle of cousins and sister and myself, drawing prancing horses and hostlers and coachmen upon the printed matter of an old *London Penny Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> I have the old volume with these examples of budding genius, and can fix the date curiously enough” [1834]. Richard Thomson also recalls beautiful old mahogany chairs, memory of which inspired many of the interior furnishings when Hugh had made the depicting of eighteenth-century social life peculiarly his own; and also a fine old family grandfather’s clock which their father exchanged “for an American atrocity”. Robert Hunter, too, tells us that “one of my earliest recollections of Hugh was of his coloured drawings of horses and dogs, and though these drawings were, of course, immature, yet they showed decided observation and spirit and feeling”.

In memories of Hugh’s early efforts at art it is always his horses and dogs that are recalled. His brother ascribes the fondness for such, as subjects, to association with the homes of those farmer kin, already mentioned. “‘Uncle Hugh’ and ‘Uncle Glenn’, as we called the Roadside Dundooan cousins of my father, were about the finest type of Nature’s gentlemen, simple and truthful, incapable of a meanness, and kindly and delightful with us children.”

His brother’s closing words concerning the character of those Dundooan farmer-folks would, if applied to Hugh himself at any stage of his career, have seemed perfectly fitting to anyone who knew him, however slightly or however intimately; for simple sincerity, unaffected modesty, instinctive rectitude, all indeed that is properly comprised with the much-abused word gentility, irradiated his aspect and inspired his actions.

<sup>1</sup> This was the organ of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, of which Lord Brougham was the first Chairman and Lord John Russell the Vice-Chairman.

If it was from his farmer-ancestry that Hugh Thomson inherited those personal characteristics which inspired all who came to know him with a strong feeling of affection and respect, it was, maybe, from his mother's side that he derived those gifts which he developed as an artist, together with a very definite talent for literature which found little expression other than in letters to his family and friends. Although we have but little recorded of his mother, we know that her sister, Mrs. Stewart Hunter, was a woman with great liking for literature, and in her home Hugh found strong formative influences, and something of that sympathy with his tastes. He has himself referred to "the sensitive vanity which tortured all my young days and which, inevitably, was so often jeered at and cut by others". It is quite likely that many of those about him regarded the young artist giving up all his time to drawing and sketching as one who was doing hardly more than waste that time in an unprofitable pursuit, little likely to lead him anywhere in a business and manufacturing community. The artist, poet, or other master of unusual gifts is too often fated to be in the position of the ugly duckling of the apologue, and Hugh Thomson, it would seem, shared the not uncommon lot.

Although, on the removal of his family to Kilrea, Hugh was left in lodgings in Coleraine, his loneliness was much lessened by the fact that at his aunt's house, "Breezemount", he had "a second home" and a number of cousins with whom he was on terms of close and affectionate intimacy. There were three sisters and five brothers, to some of whom the lad, "sick with shyness and timidity", as later on he described himself, owed, and never wearied in acknowledging, the warmest encouragement in his aspirations. His strong affection for his Hunter cousins, Ellen, Stewart, Hugh, and Robert,<sup>1</sup> never wavered but, as proved by his family correspondence,

<sup>1</sup> Ellen married Mr. Houston Dodd, of Dublin (later Judge Dodd); Stewart, the gifted and well-loved cousin, died in 1897; Hugh studied medicine and settled in New Zealand, achieving high distinction; and Robert, who still lives in Coleraine.

grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength, greatly to his advantage alike in regard to life and character. "Breezemount" ever remained a happy background throughout Hugh Thomson's life, and after he left Ireland was one of the places he most desired to revisit.

Reading shared with drawing the early enthusiasm of Hugh Thomson, as was fitting with one destined to fame as illustrator, and, as with other avid young readers, he was by no means discriminating in his selection of books but eagerly seized on all that came his way.

As the boy grew older he showed overmuch interest in such books as offered mere excitement rather than in those which possessed literary quality. This led his father to appeal to Stewart Hunter to use his quiet unsuspected influence in diverting Hugh's attention from common sensationalism to what was fine and of abiding value. Stewart took Hugh a willing captive and added him to the family reading-circle at Breezemount. Mr. Robert Hunter says, "My eldest brother, Stewart, Hugh's elder by four years, had an ardent love of books and an appreciation of literature rather unusual in a small provincial town, and in addition was a delightful reader. He infected us all with his taste for books, an inheritance from my mother, who revelled in old memoirs, biography, travel, history, and old ballads, and whose retentive memory enabled her to quote largely from her favourites. It was a recognised custom that my brother should read aloud to us whenever possible, and in this way we became acquainted with Dickens, Bret Harte, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Shakespeare, Scott, Tennyson, and later on Shelley and Browning; but in the early days readings were more confined to works of fiction. At these readings Hugh was often present whilst living in Coleraine, and I have little doubt they had an influence on his taste for reading in later years." Richard Thomson speaks of more intimate reading-parties in which Hugh took part with Stewart—"the god of his young cousin's childhood and boyhood", a very attractive and beautiful



character, a brilliant youth who, had his life been spared and his talents turned to proper account, would probably have made a very great mark. Thus it was that, under friendly guidance, the all-important after-school education went on. Hugh himself, ever grateful, ever appreciative, believed that to the influence and aid of Breezemount he owed the very foundations of his artistic literary life.

It has been mentioned that when, many years later, he recalled his boyhood to mind, Hugh Thomson would refer to the sensitive "vanity" from which he suffered—using a word that was surely never applied to him by another throughout his life. Sensitive, indeed, he always remained, and it is quite likely that as a lad he was peculiarly sensitive, too, in connection with the work to which he felt impelled. He certainly showed particular gratitude to those who encouraged him in it as Ellen and Stewart Hunter did. Others were less sympathetic. Even Hugh's father, between whom and his eldest son there was something of passionate attachment, for a time resented his aspirations towards making a profession of his art, and other members of the family regarded each step towards the realisation of those aspirations with expressed disfavour.

Consideration of the first step arose in this way. In the spring of 1877 it became known that James Bresland, for ten years headmaster of the Coleraine Model School, was leaving the town to take up a similar appointment at Ballymena. He had been very popular in Coleraine, and on the question arising of making him a public presentation of a purse of sovereigns, Mr. Stewart Hunter, senior, suggested that it should be accompanied by an illuminated address, which he felt confident his nephew could prepare. The design of that address was undertaken, as a labour of love, by sixteen-year-old Hugh, and many long evenings of his office-occupied days were devoted to its preparation. The completed work, now fifty years old, lies before us—the expression of the youth's enthusiasm for the task itself, not less than for its



object, lying in an amazing variety of admirably executed decorative lettering, testifying rather to his ingenuity and to his patient care in devotion to Nature than to ornament in the true decorative sense.

The presentation was made on May 28, 1877, and the illuminated address by "our talented young townsman" not only caused talk in Coleraine, but proved to be a turning point in Hugh's career. It is a family tradition that it was a partner in the firm to which the boy-artist was apprenticed who drew the attention of Messrs. Marcus Ward & Co. to it "as a specimen of the work of a budding young genius whom they had in their employ". To Mr. John Vinycomb, the distinguished heraldic and illuminating artist, who was for many years head of the art department of Marcus Ward's, we owe the authoritative account of how Hugh Thomson came to join his staff:

Mr. John Campbell, an intimate friend of mine, who hailed from Coleraine and was engaged in the linen business in Belfast, often spoke to me of a clever young fellow in the office of Messrs. Gribbon, linen manufacturers, Coleraine, who showed a decided talent for Art and who greatly desired to be an artist and to leave the uncongenial work of clerk in the linen office. Mr. Campbell was anxious that I should find an opening for him in the Art department of the Royal Ulster Works where he might have some scope for his ability. Willing to oblige, I took an early opportunity, being in want of an extra assistant who could be trained to do the text writing in illuminated addresses, and I desired Mr. Campbell to ask his young friend to send some specimens of his drawings and particularly of his fine writing of which I had heard so much, and I would see if I could get him placed. Specimens of his work came to hand, nothing very remarkable, but very good indeed for one who had had no other teaching beyond that acquired in the National School. Copies of prints, some freehand sketches—I forget now what they were—and some nice pieces of penmanship and text-writing, these I placed before Mr. John Ward, the guiding spirit of the firm, who on my recommendation approved, and arranged to pay a small progressive salary—barely sufficient to live on. (In similar art professions a premium would be required.)

In June negotiations were begun, and such opposition as there was to Hugh Thomson's transference from the linen

# TESTIMONIAL TO JAMES BRESLAND ESQ.

1877

Dear Sir,

With feelings of sincere, though, perhaps of selfish Regret your friends in Coleraine and the District around, learned that of your own Request you were appointed to another Sphere of Labour. They had enjoyed your Friendship, which had been both Sincere and True, so that in your Removal they sustained a personal loss while they had admired your gentlemanly Bearing towards All.

But Chiefly do they in common with all this Community regret the Loss which the Educational Interests of the Town and its Neighbourhood have borne through your Transference. During the Ten Years you were Head Master of the Coleraine Model School you raised that Institution to a high place in the Confidence and Favour of the People.

It must afford you intense Pleasure to know you are so beloved by your former Pupils and to be assured you well may, that this is the Result of your kindly Interest, of your sympathy with, and of the conscientious Discharge of your Duties towards them while under your care.

Connected with the English Grammar and Education Department you have for many years conducted most successful Classes. Into these, as indeed into all your Duties, you threw a large Amount of enthusiasm, thereby gaining for these Classes a high Position in the County.

We therefore, a Number of your Friends, recognizing the Services which for so many Years your Talents and zeal have conferred on this District, as well as to show our Esteem for, and Appreciation of you as a friend and a Gentleman, request you to allow us to present to you this Purse of Silver as a small Token thereof:— and in bidding you Farewell we desire to express the Hope, that you may be very happy in your present Position: and among whatever People you may be at any time cast, we trust your Abilities and Conduct may be as much appreciated as they have been while you were in Coleraine.

Presented on the Occasion of his leaving  
Coleraine for Ballymena.

## THE ADDRESS TO JAMES BRESLAND

Written in 1877 by Hugh Thomson, the sixteen-year-old apprentice in the house of Messrs. Gribbon, linen manufacturers. It determined his career





business of Coleraine to the art-printing works of Belfast came, not from Messrs. Gribbon, who generously offered to cancel his indentures, but from his father, to whom he sent the following letter (June 22, 1877):

. . . I was working and so busy since you left that I had no time to write to Messrs. Ward & Co. until last night. I enclose a copy of what I wrote, which I hope you will approve. I think it is quite evident you don't like the idea of my going to Belfast and if I was doing quite right I would relinquish all thought of same, but that I feel and know that I would succeed much better in life in that profession than I ever would in the Linen business. Of course all thought will be given up if Messrs. Ward & Co. will not make reasonable terms. Mr. Gribbon was speaking to me after you went out and he said that he did not like to interfere in any way with what you thought but that his own opinion was that my friends would stand very much in their own light if they didn't let me go to Ward's. He said to the same effect that he thought that was my especial line. I am very sorry I can't see you just now as I can't write any more arguments; but when I go up to Kilrea we will get talking together.

John Thomson's objection to the scheme was perhaps but the expression of the natural feeling of a man over such desire for change on the part of a son as might be in itself nothing more than evidence of instability. In any case, the "talking together" of father and son at Kilrea resulted in the objections of the elder man being overcome, and the new appointment was accepted.

Thus the summer of 1877 saw the youth of seventeen leave Coleraine for Belfast, and exchange lodgings in a small town, where he had many relations and friends and was within easy reach of his family, for an abode in a large city, where new friends were yet to be made. So he settled down at 7 Park View Terrace (since renumbered), Ballynafeigh, then a wooded suburb on the south side of Belfast, where he was about half a mile from Marcus Ward's. Here he had his home throughout the six years of his stay.

Messrs. Marcus Ward & Co. of the Royal Ulster Works were at that period at the head of the colour-printing busi-



ness, in ordinary commercial work, in Christmas cards,<sup>1</sup> and in colour-printing as applied to book-production. One of the children's books, printed and published by them in 1875, which lies before us has its colour-pages as fresh and bright as when first produced. These were the days of colour-reproduction by lithography, when photography (as adapted for such work) and three-colour processes were alike unknown. The Works was an extensive factory on the Dublin Road, on what was then the southern fringe of Belfast, for in front of the buildings were fields and hay-stacks—since which time the city has extended a further two miles up the valley of the Lagan. The hours during the time of Hugh's stay there—up to 1883—were from 8.30 A.M. to 6.45 P.M., with a dinner-hour from 1 to 2, and a half-day on Saturdays: later on the time was modified to from 9 to 6.

It was fortunate for him that, in going to work at Ward's, Hugh Thomson found himself directly under an artist so gifted, a man so sympathetic and understanding, as John Vinycomb, M.R.I.A., "the sole artistic spirit in the firm" said Frank Frankfort Moore, the novelist,<sup>2</sup> then Literary Editor of the *Belfast News Letter*, the leading Belfast journal during these years. Mr. John Vinycomb, who died in London at a very advanced age,<sup>3</sup> took pleasure in recalling his earliest association and lifelong friendship with the artist from the time when, as a shy and modest youth, he joined his staff in 1877. The nature of the work done by that staff is suggested by his statement that the artists' room was a large, well-ventilated apartment, where the preparation of original designs for pictorial and decorative work was carried on, including engraving and die-sinking, for illustrative and commercial purposes. That room was

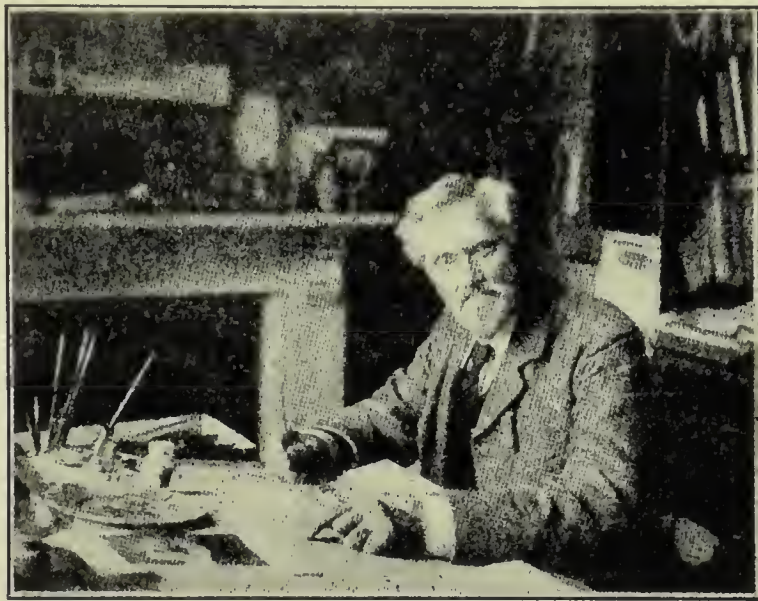
<sup>1</sup> In an account of the works published nearly fifty years ago, it is stated that the publishing of Christmas cards was an "invention" in which Marcus Ward & Co. were the pioneers.

<sup>2</sup> Frankfort Moore, who was born in Limerick in 1855, died on the 30th of May, 1931.

<sup>3</sup> In January 1928, in his ninety-sixth year.

elsewhere described as having been 100 feet long by 30 broad, and the finest room of the kind in the kingdom, and was pictured as having about forty artists engaged at its various benches, desks, and tables.

Mr. Vinycomb tells us that from the first Hugh was on the friendliest terms with all with whom he came in contact; "how could it be otherwise—to see him was to love him . . . he gained the hearts of all by his gentle courteous ways, so much beyond what we usually find in a workshop".



JOHN VINYCOMB, M.R.I.A.

Finding that my new assistant was desirous of becoming an artist pure and simple [says Mr. Vinycomb], I advised him in the often spare intervals that he should study good examples of pen-and-ink drawing by the best artists and book illustrators, to examine and compare their various styles of work, and qualities of line-work in the handling, as well as in the composition and artistic treatment, of an original subject, and that true and careful drawing was the basis of excellence if he wished to succeed; and that if he was industrious he would have plenty of time and opportunity to pursue his art. Such was about the sum of what I said to him at various times, calling attention to such works as I considered worthy of study, and that by and by, by his continued practice he would form a style entirely his own.

It is worthy of note that Hugh Thomson, at home in Coleraine, had, as it were by instinct, been following on

much the same lines as those laid down for him by the new friend, whose advice, criticism, and encouragement he was in later years never tired of acknowledging. Hugh Thomson learned by copying to be a great deal more than a copyist: he recognised that—to use R. L. Stevenson's phrase concerning his attainment of individuality of expression in another art—he was to be the “sedulous ape” only in gaining mastery of the means for giving visible expression to his own imaginings. Mr. Vinycomb speaks of him as “preparing himself for opportunities that might occur, by steady practice in drawing, composition, and treatment of original subjects in black and white, gaining at the same time freedom and mastery of hand in penwork. Hugh was an early riser, and was generally out before breakfast, in the country lanes and by-ways in the outskirts where he lodged, sketching, sometimes in water-colours, but more often in pencil. . . . At the office very often there was little to do, and in these intervals of work Hugh could do what he liked. In the evenings he was busy in his own way, and I often heard of him burning the midnight oil.” It was at such times, no doubt, that he set himself to widen his horizon. For example, he set to work on a drawing in a competition started by the *Boy's Own Paper* in December 1879, for the best pencil drawing—the prize for which he divided with another, his winning sketch, “The Church Porch”, being duly published in the paper; and a year later he engaged in another in connection with a much more important “Art Prize Competition” instituted by *The Magazine of Art*. In this instance the subject given for illustration was Macaulay's “Fragment”, *The Armada*, and in December of that year Hugh had the gratification of receiving a cheque for £3 awarded him as one of the prize-winners.

While working hard both in and out of office hours Hugh was by no means neglectful of such healthful and social recreations as offered. His friend, Mr. J. W. Carey, describes him at the time as cheerful and athletic, and from that friend's diary we learn how, with associates from the works, he rowed



and sailed, sprinted, skated, played "sokker" in local matches, went to the theatre (especially to the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, which remained something of a lifelong delight to him), was a prominent member of an amateur dramatic society, and, above all, took long walks into the country alone or in company. "We were both able to walk 40 miles in the day at that time and did it occasionally", says Carey, recalling how on one occasion, when going on holiday, Hugh walked that full distance to Kilrea. These things were episodic; a great part of the time he had to himself was given up to working at his art. And here it may be emphasised that though the period spent in Belfast was, from this point of view, the main formative one, it was so thanks to the friendly guidance of Mr. Vinycomb, who not only was himself a first-rate draughtsman, but "knew more than any other living Englishman about illuminated writing". That is the tribute of Mr. Frankfort Moore, who adds, with some pride of friendship, that Mr. Vinycomb "outraged the Belfast Corporation by proving that the arms which adorned their buildings were technically ridiculous, and almost caused a riot by hinting that the Irish national flag was really blue and not the immemorial green".

It is sometimes stated, but erroneously, that Hugh Thomson received his art training at the Belfast School of Art. This assertion was first publicly made in 1887, and was promptly contradicted by the artist himself, in the following terms:

It was Mr. John Vinycomb who gave me any instruction which I ever had. I went to the School of Art for about half-a-dozen times, and there drew an even-sided ornament diagram of the usual sort, very badly. This, with the horrid wet evenings of the time, satisfied my high art aspirations, and I took to low comedy working at home. I trouble you with all this, so that if you ever have occasion to speak kindly of me again, the credit may be given to John Vinycomb.

Of Hugh's brief appearance at the School of Art, his friend Carey says that when he went he was already too far advanced to do the tedious elementary work considered necessary by



a system "which treated all alike whatever their temperament or disposition, like a steam-roller passing over road metal".

Much concerning Hugh Thomson's years of apprenticeship to his art spent in Belfast is necessarily summarised from the many details afforded by Mr. Carey's diary and by the recollections of a young girl—who later became his wife—whom Hugh first met in July 1882. In that month, after a walk, his companion, Naismith, suggested that Hugh should accompany him to the house of his aunt, Mrs. Miller. Thomson reluctantly consented, being shy of going to strange places. There a company of young people were gathered, and a pleasant evening was passed with music and the singing of songs and choruses from the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Mrs. Miller, finding that Hugh was lonely in lodgings, said they would be glad to see him at any time he cared to join their youthful gatherings. Anxious to take advantage of the general invitation, but at first tardy in acting upon it, the young artist, after a chance meeting with a member of the family and a further invitation, came to make one of the circle of young people that met at the home in Ballynaveigh, where Mr. and Mrs. Miller and their two daughters (the only survivors of a family of eight) afforded a centre of simple social entertainment for their friends. "After that he came frequently on Thursdays and Saturdays when we generally had music or cards", Mrs. Thomson writes, "or, if a sufficient number of people were there we might push the furniture aside and have a little dance or two". It was in this cheerful, simple home that Hugh Thomson was to find his lifelong happiness.

A few of the references to Hugh from Carey's diary must be taken as representative of the many:

July 28, 1882. Went to Thomson's with umbrella he had lent me, and had a talk on Caldecott. Hugh was immensely pleased with *The Mad Dog*, *John Gilpin*, *The House that Jack Built*, etc. It was a revelation to us all, when we saw what could be done with a simple unshaded

outline, provided there was humour and fun in it. Hugh admired Abbey's<sup>1</sup> work in *Harper* and the fine lines took his fancy. He said to me "That is excellent lining for pen and ink". . . .

*Saturday, November 11, 1882.* Hugh Thomson went to Antrim with my brother John Carey, by train. The other members of the Pickwick Dramatic Club<sup>2</sup> went in two buses or brakes, the play selected being *The Road to Ruin*, because there was no copyright in it. The performance was a signal success.

*Saturday, December 16, 1882.* Hugh played for Wellington Park (Sokker football) in their gorgeous costume of blue and yellow quarterings, tabard fashion, with white shorts. . . .

At the end of the year an exhibition was being arranged of work by members of the Ramblers' Sketching Club,<sup>3</sup> which had been formed in 1881 by the men on Marcus Ward's art staff, and has since developed into the Belfast Art Society. Carey records that he contributed to this exhibition thirty-three sketches and Hugh Thomson fourteen, and that when the show was opened early in January 1883 it was agreed that "the best picture is a cavalry charge by Hugh Thomson". It was in criticising the shows of the "Ramblers" that Mr. Frankfort Moore hailed in his newspaper the work of Hugh Thomson as evidence of exceptional talent.

Early in February 1883 Carey records that he and some friends "passed Thomson's—looked in through parlour window but the old armchair was vacant. Passed an avenue further up, and saw Hugh vanishing in the distance. Bob said he was going to the Millers', and he feared he was not to be long 'a member of the choir of canty single men', or words to that effect. We whistled and threw stones but could not attract him. The magnetic current was too strong on the other side."

<sup>1</sup> Edwin A. Abbey, R.A. (1852–1911), who had at this time just completed his illustrations for Herrick's *Hesperides*.

<sup>2</sup> The club took its name from the first piece its members performed, *Bardell v. Pickwick*, in which Hugh played Mr. Pickwick "with the assistance of necessary stuffing and costume. He also took Mr. Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer*, and several other of his performances are noted. He appears to have been a capital actor.

<sup>3</sup> To early exhibitions Hugh Thomson contributed such subjects as "The Battle of Tel El Kebir", "Bringing up the Guns", "Ironsides Charging", "Before Candahar" and other figure pieces.

That the rumour among his friends was not unfounded is shown by the fact that in this month Hugh Thomson became engaged to Miss Jessie Naismith Miller. As for the impression made upon the lady by her suitor—we have it in a letter written by her to a friend in later years:

Well, when I think of Hugh's manners and when I knew him first, and indeed to a great degree during all his life, I am a little reminded of the episode of Mr. Smith in Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Hugh lived an absolutely retired life, he had scarcely been in any private house during the five years he had been in Belfast when first I met him. His shyness for one thing, and difference in tastes I think, prevented him from making any intimate acquaintances, except of course the Careys, whom he met daily in Ward's. He spent his evenings in the summer in long lonely walks, and in the winter in reading and drawing.

And so, when I met him, he struck me at once as being entirely different from any one I had previously known, and his manners were quite old-fashioned in their gentle deference. Elderly ladies liked his ways with them,—the little courtly bend down towards them, when they spoke to him, and the air of anxious and interested attention he gave to anything they said, pleased them greatly; one lady commented on that to me afterwards, remarking how different it was to the behaviour of many young men about, who seemed to feel—sometimes even *showed*—that they regarded old ladies as bores. Like Mr. Smith and his chess, Hugh seemed to have taken his manners from the old-fashioned type of books he loved, so that when he played old Hardcastle, the manners of the time came natural to him, and not stilted or forced.

Hugh was without any immediate prospect of getting married, his salary being but £2 : 10s. a week. But the young couple were content to wait, and for some months more Hugh's daily work at Marcus Ward's and long spells of private practice at drawing continued, varied by occasional walks and other exercise. Mr. Carey says that "he kept to himself so much because he drew so much at home, and he was always fearful of people monopolising his time. It was hard to get him to promise to go to any amusement—he wanted to be free to draw if he found himself inclined that way."

We are told by the same friend that Hugh hoarded his work but not his money. His interest was art. That was his treasure, and it eclipsed other things. "I don't think he would





THE RETURN FROM THE PLOUGHING MATCH

Water-colour painting, drawn from memory, before Hugh Thomson left Ireland, 1883





have sold his work if it could have been avoided. I used to have arguments with him about such things as 'Is the horse a beautiful animal?' I said the deer was better, but he held that no animal had such beautiful curves as the horse." Hugh was doubtless drawing with a view that went far beyond Marcus Ward's works, and was "hoarding" his sketches as evidence of work done and capacity to do. In the diary we find an entry: "Went to Hugh's for tea and looked at his drawings and pictures. He has his numerous drawings neatly mounted on brown paper of a uniform size. He keeps all his work and asked why I gave all mine away." The same friend in telling how he had drawn the Ballymena oatmeal mill says: "Hugh put in a splendid horse and cart in front of it. I did not know he could do anything so perfect from memory. He walked alongside the carts on his way to business and stored it away in his memory; anatomy, light and shade, buckles, harness, and everything. It was sometime before I realised that Hugh was really a figure artist and not a letterer and writer of script."

Other of the diarist's notes throw light on the character of the artist, such as: "Lent X and Thomson 10/- each. I will get back half of it. Hugh's word is better than many other people's I-owe-you's. It was, by the way, the same X who ordered a suit of Hugh's tailor, and had it entered to Hugh—who paid the bill. X promised to repay him, but there the matter ended."

After becoming engaged to Miss Miller Hugh went to Dublin for a week to stay with his cousin Ellen and her husband (afterwards the Mr. Justice Dodd, P.C., aforementioned), and the idea of his leaving Belfast for London may have there been bruited as a possibility if Marcus Ward's did not offer him some better prospect than they seemed disposed to do. Later in the year, when on a visit to Belfast, Mrs. Dodd was emphatic in advising that Hugh should try his fortunes in London. The firm was not, apparently, inclined to encourage native talent. As we learn from Mr. Vinycomb, the drawings required for the firm's art

publications were procured elsewhere ; “a member of the firm resident in London was the means of procuring most of them, arranging with artists, and illustrators in black and white. In this matter I was anxious that Hugh Thomson should do some of the book illustrations instead of the London artists. Time and again I brought a number of Hugh’s drawings in pen and ink to Mr. John Ward’s notice, feeling that they would be quite up to the mark, but usually met with an evasive reply, that he would see to it, etc., etc. On the last occasion on which I appealed to Mr. Ward I showed him, among some other things, a complete set of illustrations for a well-known novel (Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*)—only to meet with a *non plus*. Hereupon Hugh sent in his notice to leave. The purblind asses! My admiration for the work which showed such promise, all set at naught and despised—I was disgusted.”

Of what may be described as “published” work done by Hugh Thomson during his Belfast period there was a striking pen-and-ink portrait of John Rea, a celebrated Belfast attorney, which was later reproduced as a picture post card; and a series of box-covers consisting of coloured designs, from *Patience* and other of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, which were reproduced by lithography at the works.

On the last day of November 1883 Hugh Thomson left Belfast in *The Manx Queen*, bound for Barrow and London, bearing with him an accumulation of sketches, many of them doubtless prepared in view of the adventure, and carrying introductions to various people and firms, with one of whom he hoped to find an opportunity better than Belfast had to offer after six and a half years of work. On the same vessel with him, it is worthy of note, journeyed two ex-students of the Belfast Art School, Mr. Albert Morrow and Mr. A. D. McCormick<sup>1</sup> (also a native of Coleraine), both of whom were also to become prominent in their profession. On the following day the three young artists trod the streets of London.

<sup>1</sup> Now R.I., and a distinguished member of the Arts Club, of London.

## CHAPTER II

THE ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE

1884-1889



UGH THOMSON arrived in London on Saturday, December 1, 1883, with a few pounds in his pocket, high hopes in his heart, and with several letters of introduction, one or other of which might prove the means to the realisation of his desire. He went into lodgings at 9 Farleigh Road, Stoke Newington, and thence, on the evening of his arrival, he wrote: "I arrived here a few hours ago, feeling very greasy and lurchy, as things still suggest earthquakes or furniture with too much liquor".

On the following Monday he started on a round to present his introductions and show his sketches, but found nothing more encouraging than the possibility of work later on. The only immediate prospect seemed the taking up of such work as he had left in Belfast—at this, he felt confident, he could get a position if it became absolutely necessary so to do, by accepting less than the sum he first named. "I said six guineas a week was the salary I would expect (don't grin, and ask Dick not to bring down the ceiling with a ponderous laugh). I asked so much as I really did not want a berth in a chromolithography house again."

Although Hugh wrote thus bravely to his father, the result of a few weeks in London, at the very worst season of the year for making any attempt of the kind, was that he already began to feel anxious and depressed as to the outcome of his

The Initial letter to this chapter is from *Pride and Prejudice*, published by George Allen in 1894.



great adventuring. He had met with no success at the office of the *Illustrated London News*, to which he had a letter of recommendation from the Wards. He was not prepared, financially, to undertake a slow siege of the publishers, and in the beginning of January he became sadly convinced that he must go back to lithography: "If I did not do this, father would be popping over another £5 or £10 note, and it almost makes me cry when I think of his goodness and the trouble he is in about me". By the 11th of January he wrote that he had for three days been on a trial piece of work, and would probably be working for the firm of McClure, Macdonald & MacGregor all through the day thenceforward, though not yet sure "whether Mr. McClure will agree to give me £4 a week which I asked". Three days later Hugh wrote to Mr. Vinycomb, who had sent him some small "transfer" work to do, in thoughtful friendliness, in order to help tide him over the time of waiting, hoping that he will regard the work done "as a little favour (in return for all I have received from you) as between friends, or as Silas Wegg puts it, 'Now, Mr. Wenus, as atween man and man', and dear Mr. Winycomb, I hope to see many such from you, as it will always assure me that I still retain your friendship and have some share in the heraldic book. . . . I am changing into new lodgings in the south towards Kennington Park, where I will have a good large front room all to myself in which to allow my pleasing fancies to take shape, and to be rejected with contempt. . . . If I decide to enter McClure's, before I go regularly to work I will have a tour round the book publishers, although I do not anticipate any success, but my trying will then be complete, and I should feel satisfied that I am not going to take the publishers by storm." The only objection he found to McClure's was that the hours, nine to seven with one and a half hours to and fro, would leave very little time "to do much at the principal work I have before me".

Somewhere about this period, apparently on his own initiative, Hugh wrote to Mr. Joseph Comyns Carr, the editor



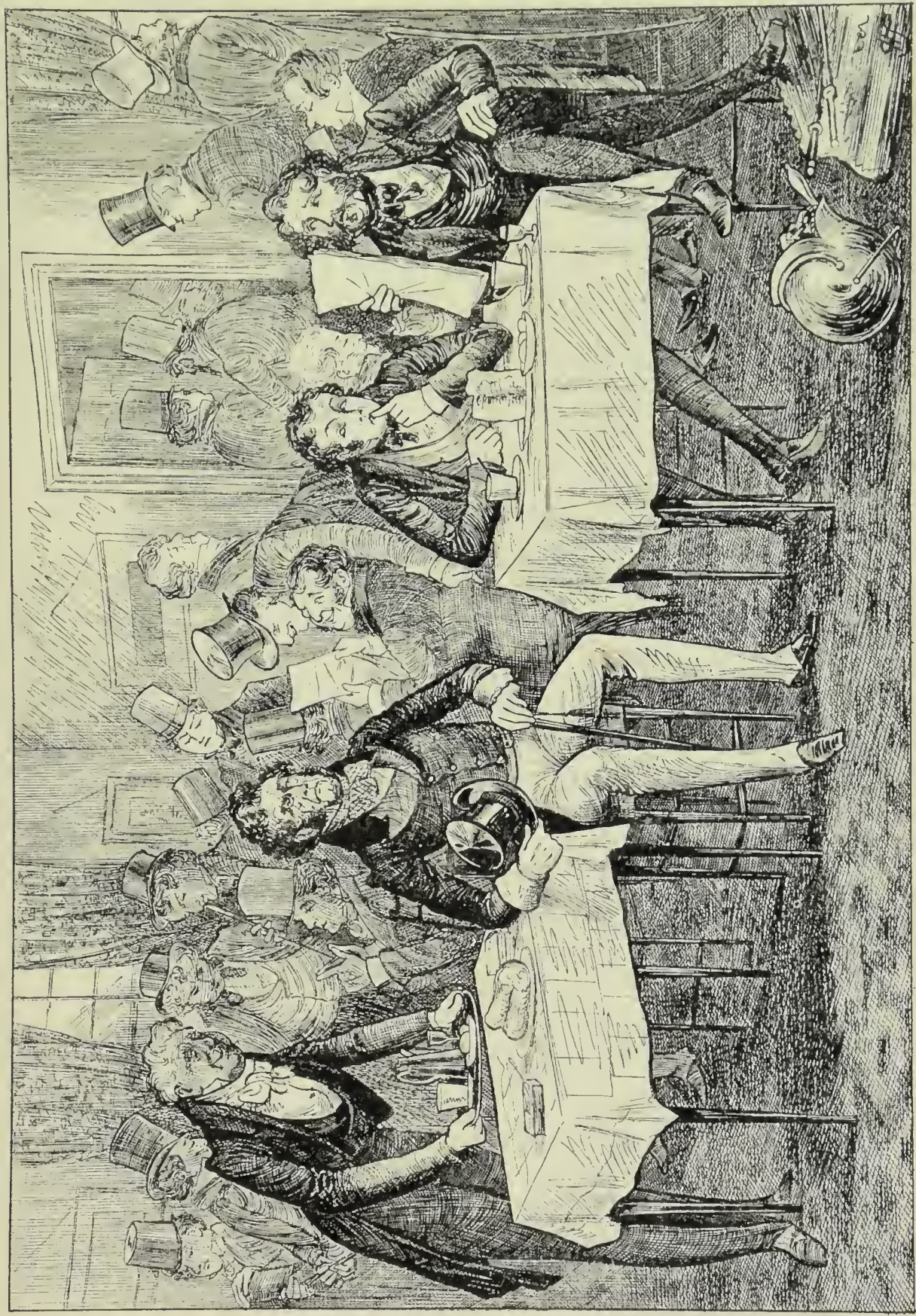
“When Sir Pitt Crawley actually said to Mrs. Rawdon ‘Ahem; Rebecca, may I give you a wing?’”

This illustration to *Vanity Fair*—showing Sir Pitt Crawley, Major Rawdon Crawley, and Becky Sharp and others—is among the early drawings to Thackeray’s works which Hugh brought to London

One of his few wash drawings, it exhibits the youth’s surprising skill with the brush, and his appreciation of light and shade







MAJOR PENDENNIS AND THE INTERLOPERS AT HIS BREAKFAST TABLE

(An example of Hugh Thomson's early private essays in illustrating Thackeray's *Pendennis* and *Vanity Fair*.)



of the recently founded *English Illustrated Magazine*, asking for an interview. He had not long been in his new lodgings at 51 Doddington Grove, Kennington Park, when he received a note from Mr. Carr asking him to call on Friday, January 25. He went, taking his *Vanity Fair* and other drawings with him.

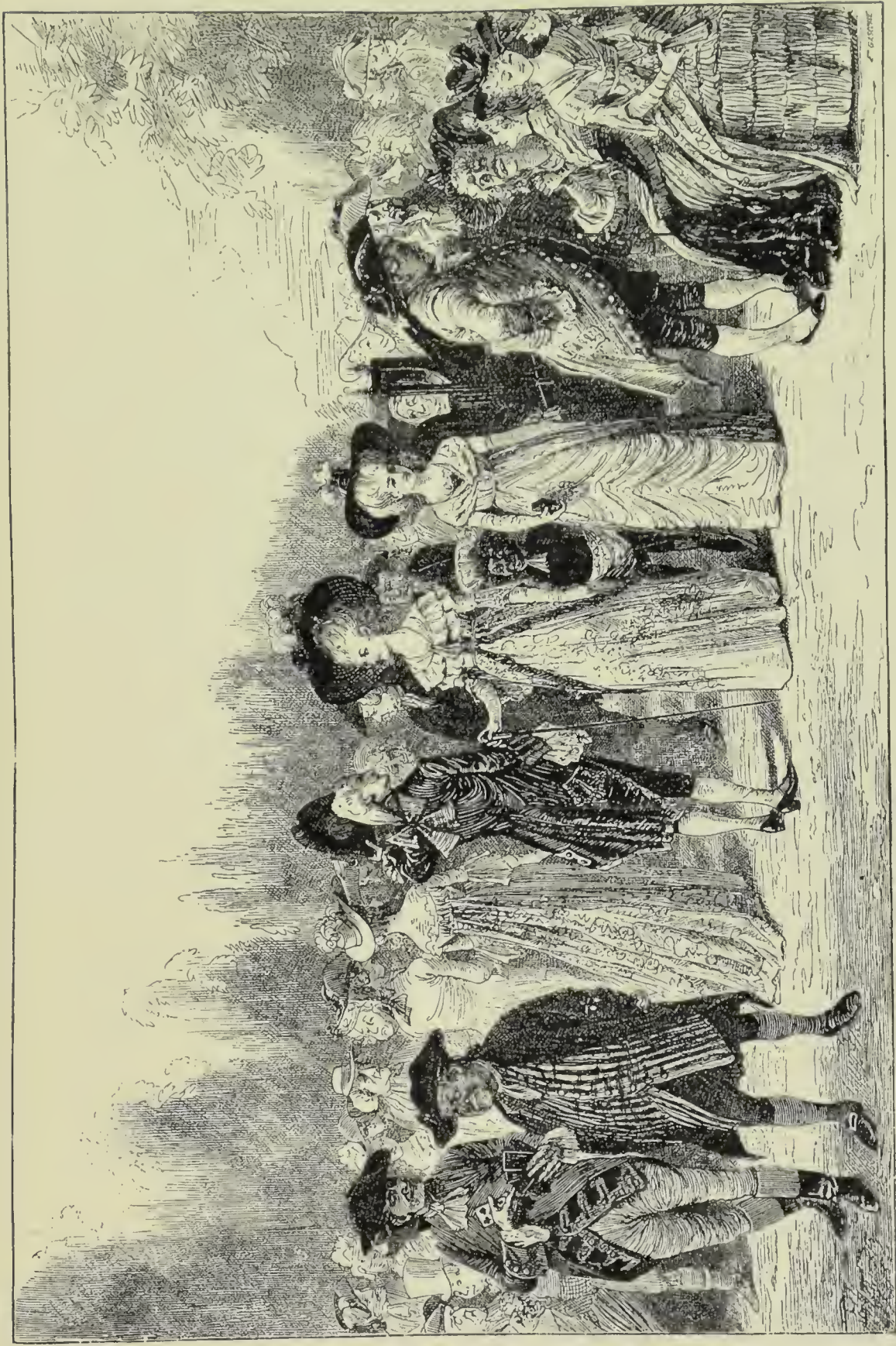
Mr. A. G. Gilbert, the editor's assistant at the time, remembers that first visit, "when he so shyly brought in the specimens of his work for Comyns Carr's inspection, and the expression of pleasure on his face at Comyns Carr's recognition of the merit of the work". Carr, who was later to record his memory of that momentous meeting, could hardly believe that the young man who came to see him had himself done the drawings that he showed, and felt convinced that if he had, then was a new genius discovered. To reassure himself on the point Carr asked Hugh to make a drawing for him of the Promenade at Bath in the eighteenth century. This was duly accomplished, and a letter asked the artist to call at Messrs. Macmillan's on the following Saturday (February 2), when the definite offer was made him of a month's trial engagement at £4 a week. On the next day, as we learn from one of Hugh's letters, he "was out to dinner with McClure who was a little disappointed when I told him of the change I was going to make, but cleared up like a brick afterwards and acknowledged that I was quite right, and wished me success". In the same letter he says: "Mr. Carr is very well pleased with the pen-and-ink drawing I made him of the promenade at Bath during the last century, and I think the engraving will be gone on with.<sup>1</sup> The next thing I have to do is to visit the Covent Garden market at an early hour in the morning and see some of the characters there.<sup>2</sup> Then after that the theatres<sup>3</sup> so I am quite in my element and of course in good spirits."

<sup>1</sup> This was the first example of Hugh Thomson's work to appear in the *English Illustrated Magazine*; it accompanied an article by H. D. Traill on *Two Centuries of Bath* in the number for June 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Printed with Austin Dobson's *The Tour of Covent Garden*, *E.I.M.*, September 1884.

<sup>3</sup> Character sketches of celebrated actors and actresses, accompanying *The Dramatic Outlook* by Henry Arthur Jones, *E.I.M.*, January and February 1885.





THE PARADE AT BATH IN THE LAST CENTURY

From "*Two Centuries of Bath*," by H. D. Traill, in the "*English Illustrated Magazine*," June 1884

(Hugh Thomson's first published work in England as engraved on wood by E. Gascoine.)



He entered upon the new work on February 11, 1884, the day after writing that letter.

It was indeed a happy occasion that brought Hugh Thomson into relation with the editor and publishers of the *E.I.M.*, as well as with the magazine itself, and its distinguished contributors—happy, it may be said, for all concerned. It gave to Hugh at once that regularity of income which was essential, and such work as he delighted in doing, and that under an editor who was gifted not only with a wide knowledge of art and of the world, but with such tact, sympathy, and personal charm as combined to bring out all that was best in those who worked under his leadership. It gave to Carr and his magazine a contributor who was, more than any other single artist, to help in giving that magazine an individual character. And it gave to the publishers an artist whose loyal adherence was to contribute its note of distinction to their “list” for close on forty years. The young man forthwith took his place as a worker in the very best company of artists and authors of the time. Among the writers in the first volume of the *E.I.M.* were Austin Dobson, Henry James, Algernon C. Swinburne, Andrew Lang, R. L. Stevenson, J. P. Mahaffy, Walter Besant, J. H. Shorthouse, William Morris, Theodore Watts [-Dunton], Thomas Huxley, William Black, Canon Alfred Ainger, Thomas Hardy, Stanley Weyman, [Sir] Edmund Gosse, and also, happily still with us, Mr. Arthur Reed Ropes—better known as Adrian Ross; while the artists included Alfred Parsons, Napier Hemy, Randolph Caldecott, R. W. Macbeth, Walter Crane, George du Maurier, and Harry Furniss—and in the course of a few months Hugh Thomson was acknowledged as *inter pares*.

Hugh Thomson, ever generous in his recognition of help, freely acknowledged that he owed much to the kindly advice and guidance of Joseph Comyns Carr during the years of their joint connection with the *E.I.M.* The month of trial sufficed to make Carr realise that he had done well in enlisting the young Irishman under his banner. On his cordial



recommendation, on March 10, Mr. (now Sir) Frederick Macmillan wrote to Hugh offering him a year's engagement at £5 a week, to do such work as Carr required, and not to work for anyone else. This was accepted "with the greatest delight". Under the terms of this engagement Hugh felt compelled to return some work the friendly Mr. Vinycomb had sent him, and described the doing so as a painful task. A part of the letter (March 14, 1884) with which he accompanied it may be quoted for its self-revelatory touches:

When I describe to you the way in which my work and my pleasure are running side by side you will I hope understand and excuse the fact of the work you sent me being scarcely touched. . . . When asked to do the Covent Garden sketches I spent some portion of the time for a few days in the Market, which I always looked on, from my practice of settled hours in Ward's, as time spent by myself, and I felt that, to make up a decent show of interest in what I was doing, my evenings must be devoted to the drawings; and as in the old *Vanity Fair* days, the time at which I should have gone to bed was the time I was most deeply interested in what I was doing, so that I turned out a lot of work. Then for an article on The Horse, of which I have the proof sheets, Mr. Carr said he would like me to visit Rotten Row pretty often for an hour and a half or two hours in the day. Now, the theatres are being honoured by my presence. I have been to two, and on Monday night I go to hear Salvini and perhaps shall be going three or four nights, so as to see him in several characters. The sketches of Toole and Wilson Barrett Mr. Carr seemed pleased with. . . . I must not forget, too, the other big job which lies between. Mr. Carr is the editor and art manager of the *E.I.M.*, superintends and gets all in connection with it done, and it is to him I am mainly responsible; but about a fortnight ago he brought Mr. Macmillan up to his room and introduced me. After a little talk Mr. Macmillan said they had a book in hand for which they wanted 8 or 12 full page illustrations. On Wednesday night he sent me a letter with the proof sheets of half the novel,<sup>1</sup> saying that there was no hurry for the drawings until Mr. Carr could spare me, but would I read it at my leisure, and see if I could get a dozen good compositions out of it, when I receive the remainder of the book. You will see, dear Mr. Vinycomb, that more than ever, after their generous treatment of

<sup>1</sup> *Charlie Asgarde: the Story of a Friendship*. By Alfred St. Johnston. It was published towards the close of 1884, a not very distinguished tale of the Robinson Crusoe cannibal type. Thomson's twelve illustrations have no special individuality or distinction, and by the time the book appeared his work had so developed that it is not surprising to find that in writing to his father the artist expressed his own dissatisfaction with them.

me, all my time must be engrossed by their work, even if I had not given my word to that effect when accepting their offer on Monday. . . . Naturally it is not so pleasant as the work I am at, and this makes the matter all the worse for me, that there can be a suspicion that I shirk the work for which I have not so much taste. . . .

I trust you will understand, dear Sir, the respectful feelings, and grateful ones, too, with which I write all this round-about explanation or justification, whatever is the best term. Perhaps you will see in it some justification for my inability to carry out the promise I gave you ere leaving Belfast, and of which you gave me the advantage when I was very glad and grateful and needy for it. I shall always recollect and appreciate your kindness in that, and when I was brought up under you, and hope that now you will not think little of me through this affair which has its very bright side, and yet this shady one, for me. . . .

On Sunday I am invited up to Mr. Carr's and he will take me to Mr. E. Burne Jones's studio. They seem to be great chums. I was up to dinner one night two weeks ago and there saw a painting and many sketches of Mr. Jones's, the painting being a beautiful portrait of Mr. Carr's boy, not unlike Fra Angelico, only with long aesthetic hair. . . .<sup>1</sup>

We see here the practical kindness of Carr in taking his protégé about and making him known, and realise how rapidly—despite his short period of gloomy feelings as to the difficulty of securing a niche in London—Hugh had succeeded in finding what may be regarded as a perfect position.

Although some of Hugh Thomson's earlier work for the *E.I.M.* had little distinction, it may be said that, with the series of a dozen drawings to Austin Dobson's *The Squire at Vauxhall*, in the part for December 1884, he had definitely established his position, and had discovered his special and natural place in the social surroundings of the eighteenth century. A year later he was to emphasise the dual fact in a yet more definite fashion. In June 1884 he wrote: "I am going in more for putting a little poetry into my drawings since I have been able to study closely du Maurier's charming design,<sup>2</sup> more commonplace than that certainly, but yet the

<sup>1</sup> This was the portrait of Philip Comyns Carr, which was declared by a leading critic—when it was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1883—to be "the saddest and intensest portrait of a little boy that was ever painted".

<sup>2</sup> A beautiful drawing by George du Maurier in the *E.I.M.* (June 1884), illustrating a poem *Der Tod als Freund*, admirably translated by the artist from Madame Necker's French poem which itself was inspired by the celebrated Düreresque

poetry of human troubles and sorrows. I was conscious in doing the dance drawings (*E.I.M.*, June 1884) that the objection might be made that the crowd seemed very hollow and vain. But after all in such scenes, and especially in the last century ones, such emotions were kept well in hand and never showed on the surface."

Here it may be pointed out that the work Hugh Thomson did for the *E.I.M.* was not drawn in the order of its appearance, but was sometimes done long—in one instance six years—before publication. Thus we learn from his letters that in September 1884 the artist was making drawings for Austin Dobson's essay *In Leicester Fields*, yet they did not appear in the magazine until August 1886. His enthusiasm for his work and his jealous regard for the *E.I.M.* are indicated by one of many such passages from the weekly letters—sometimes twelve pages long—written to his well-loved and loving father in Kilrea. He says:

I called on Mr. Dobson and he was telling me that an American Interviewer had called on him. "One of those fellows who take down all you say for their paper", said he; "and", he added, "your name is now in America, for I told him that Mr. Hugh Thomson was illustrating very nicely the poem of *The Squire at Vauxhall*." Mr. Dobson has been kind in this, as it is always a kind of advertisement. I professed myself most anxious to see the extract from the paper, and Mr. Dobson said they had sent him a number but unfortunately he had not got it just then. However, he promised to lend me two books which I needed to refer to about the drawings for *Leicester Fields*. . . .

*Charlie Asgarde* has been published and I believe is selling rapidly as Mr. Hutt, the manager through whom all engraved blocks pass to the printer, could not get me a copy as he wanted to. However, he will be able in a few days. . . .

So this is a budget about artists and the Christmas numbers. Probably *Harpers* will be coming out with something this year to whop us into insignificance. However, that cannot be helped. I am looking forward most anxiously to the appearance of ours; as you may guess, it is a very unsatisfactory look one gets in a hasty glimpse of a proof book.

After arranging the year's engagement with Macmillan's

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woodcut by Alfred Rethel (1816-59). Du Maurier shows Rethel's masterpiece hanging on the wall.



Hugh indulged his delight in “the ruralities” by removing from Kennington to Putney, where from lodgings at 6 Bevan Villas, Lower Richmond Road, he had Barnes, Putney, and Wimbledon Commons, Richmond Park and the riverside for satisfying his country-loving tastes, and suggesting landscape backgrounds. Here, too, he was able to take steps for



MRS. THOMSON AT THE TIME OF HER MARRIAGE (1884)

having out a boat every day he wished, except at the weekends. He delighted in frequent rowing exercise, thinking out the work in hand and every now and then jotting down rough notes of designs to be developed when he returned to his lodgings.

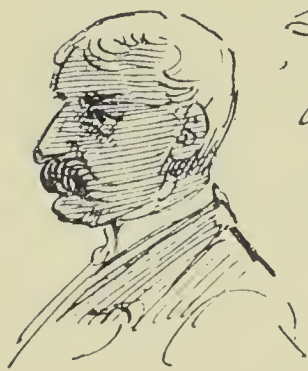
In October, nearly a year after leaving Belfast—following on a period when “a horrible cloud of a dyspeptic nature hung over” him—Hugh Thomson crossed to Ireland on his first holiday, and it was then arranged, as it might be long before any other opportunity might occur, that, when he returned again for a few days at Christmas, he and Jessie Miller should be married. Hugh had received an encouraging reply

to a tentative enquiry as to whether his salaried position with Macmillans would be renewed when March came round again, and the wedding was duly fixed for December 29. On the 15th of that month some friends of the bride gave a farewell dance in her honour in view of the forthcoming celebration; but two days later there befell a sad tragedy and the threat of yet another: her only sister died suddenly from peritonitis, and their mother became seriously ill. The season that should have been one of double festivity was shadowed by sorrow, and it seemed that the marriage might have to be postponed. Hugh, however, proposed that it should take place quietly as arranged, saying that he would return to London and leave Jessie to remain in Belfast as long as her mother should require her attention. So it was arranged, and so done—the bride returning to her parents' sad home and her filial duties, and the bridegroom to London and his work.

Early in 1885 he was engaged on the drawings for a three-part story by Bret Harte, and he went to discuss the subject with the author, being "deeply interested in seeing the man whose works Stewart (Hunter) was the first to bring before us boys". Of Bret Harte Hugh wrote: "I was rather astonished to find him quite a little man, not higher than myself, and elegantly made, with a deep red face heightened by white hair. His mustache is dark Something like the accompanying (sketch) is the effect of the man's face." The author was

*His mustache is dark*

*Something like the  
'accompanying is the  
effect of the man's  
face*



HUGH DESCRIBES BRET HARTE TO HIS FATHER

cordially appreciative of the artist's work, and of an illustration for the concluding part said, "It is equal to your best—the face of Mr. Nott with his preternaturally arch wink indeed is sure better than your drawings in the first part of the story which I so much admired". And Bret Harte wrote also to the publishers in a like appreciative strain of Thomson's work on the story.<sup>1</sup>

When the drawings for that story were done Comyns Carr, having at the moment nothing on hand to allocate to Hugh, gave him some friendly advice. "I am always doing a little work [Hugh wrote to his father], indeed that is absolutely necessary as I feel that during last summer, and until lately, I neither did myself nor Macmillan's people justice. Although my drawings look to some people all right yet to judges they are capable of great improvement. This is putting it mildly, and as for myself, the older I grow the more I see do I need improvement. So I am going to work more from life, making a drawing at least once a week from a model. This will cost me something at the rate of 10d. an hour at least for two or three hours at a spell, but Mr. Carr advises this, and it is another evidence of his desire for my good, as the time devoted to the drawing from life is so much time taken from the work for him. He also advises my getting a card for the National Gallery and having a day every week there copying some of the Old Masters, a head, or the whole perhaps of a fine figure. If I am ever to get on or be better than I am, I must educate myself, as I cannot afford the schools."

The resolution to draw from the model was not long maintained, the artist seeming ever to get on better by relying on rapid and accurate observation, impressed on a memory curiously retentive of details; and patient self-education was nearer to the production of fine individual work than he himself suspected. In truth, the living model troubled him far more than it helped him, so that he had recourse to the "lay-

<sup>1</sup> *A Ship of '49*, *E.I.M.*, March, April, and May, 1885.



figure" but with no greater satisfaction. Mrs. Hugh Thomson explains the matter thus:

While we were in West Kensington Hugh thought that a female lay-figure might possibly be of service and spoke of it to his friend Mr. Baker who, later on, suggested that Hugh should procure one through an advertisement. He did so. But it was never of any use to him; it worried and fidgetted him as he tried to arrange it just as much as if it had been a living model—and even then he had no costumes to put on the figure: costumes he found much too expensive to buy. Nothing of mine, of course, was of any use, and unfortunately I have no capacity for cutting out and making clothes. So the lay-figure was almost immediately pushed into a corner out of the way and for some years just took up needed space. . . . So Hugh decided to get rid of it and "artists' requirements" people took it away, and we all heaved a sigh of relief when we saw it out of the house. Hugh had kept on all the time in his old way, drawing either from his own impressions or from memory, or, when he needed it, getting me to stand or sit for him just for a few minutes for a brief sketch of a fold or an attitude. But most of his work he did without any assistance of that kind.

Two days before Hugh Thomson's letter to his father was written the year's agreement with Macmillans had come to an end and was renewed on the same terms as before, and it was at about the same time that he began the work which more than any other may be said to have "made his name" as an illustrator and established him firmly in that century with which his art was to be most closely identified. His friendly editor, with what may be regarded as an inspiration of editorial genius, having no particular task to allot to Thomson, told him to cast about and find in the eighteenth-century writers anything in his line, and Hugh, with further inspiration, "pitched on this chapter of the *Spectator* (Sir Roger de Coverley goes to the Assizes) as being about the most delightfully humorous of them all, save that where Sir Roger's conduct at church is described". The artist's delight in the de Coverley papers of the *Spectator* was very real, and was reflected in the work in which he soon found his energies engrossed and his imagination vividly at play. "I think they will be amongst the best things I have done yet", he wrote to his father.

In March Mrs. Thomson's invalid mother worried so greatly over keeping the young wife and husband apart, that his bride at last joined Hugh in his Putney lodgings for their delayed honeymoon. In a few weeks, however, news of Mrs. Miller's alarming relapse recalled her daughter to Belfast, when the dreaded end occurred; and there, saddened by her mother's death and engaged in the duty of settling her father in a new home, she remained for several weeks.

On June the 12th Hugh wrote to his father: "Jessie got home to me on Saturday, and wasn't I glad to see the little woman. Ever since, I have been perfectly happy and contented, and think all day long that I have got the best little woman in the world. You will be glad to know that we have taken a house into which we expect to get about the first or second week in July. . . . I am just finishing up *Sir Roger de Coverley*, which I will hand in completed next week.<sup>1</sup> I availed myself of a beautiful spray of hawthorn, which I brought in a week or two ago and which opened out in a jar on my table, to make a nice heading, something after the [Alfred] Parsons' style. I hope it will print nicely as Mr. Carr admires it, and I am quite proud of it."

A letter which Hugh wrote, on the same day, to his cousin Ellen, Mrs. Dodd, shows that she had been rallying him on his being too easily contented, for he confesses that he is jogging on at the same old sum per week, "and have not the pluck to ask for more as no sooner have I made up my mind to do it than something encouraging is said regarding the work (not often, but, strange to say, always about the time I think it would be suitable to see what advance they could give me), and this of course prevents me, as I know very well, should I be in their place, the inference I would draw—that I could not give a word of commendation but it was taken advantage of. Bret Harte wrote a very kind letter which

<sup>1</sup> That, it should be understood, is only the first of the series of papers, entitled *A Day with Sir Roger de Coverley*; with twelve illustrations it appeared in the Christmas number of the *E.I.M.* Later on the title was necessarily altered to *Days with*, etc.







A SCENE ON THE THAMES

From a water-colour painting

closed my mouth for a long time, and when I thought a proper season had elapsed something very cutting in a critique made me see myself in a very humble light. Lately I have been illustrating that paper of the *Spectator* in which Sir Roger takes Will Wimble and the Spectator to the Assizes, and Mr. Carr was good enough to say I was advancing, and this quite overcame me. . . . So as trade is bad and the expenses heavy and the advantages I enjoy very great I remain more content than perhaps I am justified in being with such a good and dear little wife as I have dependent on me."

In July Hugh tells of a journey to Chalfont to make a couple of drawings of Milton's Cottage and the Village Street,<sup>1</sup> and of a particularly strenuous day at his favourite exercise on the river:

Yesterday being a glorious day I pulled Jessie up the length of Teddington Lock, 11 miles from Putney by river, past the village of Twickenham where Pope the poet lived, and past Richmond and Richmond Hill with the Star and Garter hotel of novel celebrity . . . that was a pull I must take you on, to see the villa lawns sloping down to the river edge and the sloping sylvan character of the scenery with its well-wooded banks. It is a pity that you will not see it in its beauty of rose trees and flowers on the lawns, but perhaps the autumn leaves will make up for that. . . . To tell you the truth here we have far greater advantages of country than you have even at Kilrea, strange as it may seem. You have no places free to anyone, like our commons of Putney and Wimbledon, with their growth of furze and tree, on which you can lie all day long if you like, with no "Trespassers will be prosecuted" hanging over your head as a threat. . . . Jessie was looking so done up that I thought it would not do to allow her to knock about the house much longer, and so with the exception of Wednesday I have taken her out on the river every day.

The tentative essay in illustrating the doings of Sir Roger de Coverley and his circle pleased Comyns Carr so well that he asked Hugh to go on with a series of the *Spectator* papers in which the genial knight plays his part. Mrs. Thomson recalls for us a memory of those days:

<sup>1</sup> These did not appear for more than six years, in the *E.I.M.* for November 1891.



Hugh was working at the Sir Roger drawings when I came over in 1885, and when we got settled in our own house (Stewart Villa, Erpingham Road, Putney) Hugh not being able to afford models, or indeed caring for them, in his enthusiasm pressed me into his service. In an old overcoat of Hugh's arranged for the occasion, I have been one of the country gentlemen "stealing a sight of me over the hedge". In an old nightshirt of Hugh's, arranged to do duty as a smock, I have been in "weekly instruction in the psalms", and, also in the overcoat again, and mounted on a hassock, I have been the "instructor" himself. I was also the widow in "The widow consults her lawyer", and other scenes, but I am afraid I was never any real use. I have unfortunately absolutely nothing of the actor in me, and not being strong, I grew very quickly tired, so my services as a model, except in the most trivial ways, came to an end. Hugh also found trying to work from a model troublesome, not having been trained to it.

With all his delight in the work which he was doing the artist had fits of depression and self-distrust, and his constant desire to do it always a little bit better made him at times fidgety, and, declaring that things would not come right, he would cast aside drawing after drawing in the attempt to satisfy himself that he had got his best. One of these spells interrupted the work on the Sir Roger drawings, and on his usual day for taking his monthly batch to the editor he was not ready, and, it would seem, wrote explaining this in a note that betrayed his nervous depression. Comyns Carr, as Mrs. Thomson tells us, proved not only an encouraging critic, but also the perfect friend, and "on Sunday afternoon arrived unexpectedly, remained to tea, and so laughed at Hugh's fears, and cheered him by his bright ways and talk, and his delightful laugh, that next morning Hugh was quite himself again, and full of energy for his work. That was just Mr. Comyns Carr—full of ready, helpful kindness, and always with the cheery word of encouragement, consciously and unconsciously he helped Hugh many a time, and at *this* time when Hugh was in a low state, the cheerful looks and words just gave him the necessary stimulus, added to the feeling—also helpful—that Mr. Carr believed in him, and in his powers as an artist."



At Erpingham Road, the Thomsons had for next-door neighbour a Scottish artist, Peter Buchanan, with whom—after Hugh's hesitation in the making of new acquaintances had been overcome—they were on a friendly footing; the two artists frequently going on sketching outings together. Through Buchanan Hugh met another Scottish artist, James E. Christie, "a big man in every way, heart and nature and capacity", with whom he rapidly formed a very pleasant friendship. Physically Christie of the leonine head was so big a man that a friend said that he "threw everything else out of focus" on coming into a room. Though Hugh was too intent on his work, and too fond of the simple home life in which he could ponder and do that work, to become a frequent attendant at clubs and coteries, he greatly enjoyed the unpretentious and friendly gatherings that Christie was fond of having in his Chelsea studio.

Early in 1886 Hugh's father—who had paid a visit in the preceding September—sent him a little puppy, a brindled Irish terrier that grew up to be Hugh's constant companion on his walks, and remained such for the ten years of its life—"Mick's" canine humours and exploits providing a frequent topic in the letters home. During the spring of the same year a far more important arrival in the little house in Erpingham Road was the Thomsons' only child, a son, who was named John after his paternal grandfather.

When the first of the Sir Roger de Coverley papers had appeared in the *E.I.M.*, the appreciation shown by Comyns Carr was endorsed not only by the critics but by the publishers, who early recognised the possibility of reissuing them in book form. Work on these papers occupied most of the year 1886, and although the second did not appear until April, four had already been completed. Only the drawings to the first of the papers passed through the engravers' hands. It was found that where illustrating was on so lavish a scale engraving was too costly, and so the subsequent drawings were reproduced by the zinco-photographic process, a change

which the artist welcomed, "inasmuch as it gives to a certain extent the facsimile of my work". From April to October the series appeared regularly, and in the latter month was republished in separate volume form. Of the way in which this work established the artist's reputation there is varied evidence.



MR. WILL WIMBLE RECOUNTING TO SIR ROGER [AND SIR RICHARD STEELE]  
"HOW THE JACK WAS CAUGHT"

*From "Days with Sir Roger de Coverley", published by Macmillan & Co., 1886*

Writing to his father with reference to an early newspaper notice, Hugh said:

I know you will relish the notice, and in truth it is far beyond what my wildest dreams could have been, considering what a man Abbey is, and how much appreciated in London. It was Mr. Carr who told me of it when I was up yesterday, and advised me to go to the *Globe* office and see the paragraph. He was in great spirits about it, as much as if



he was a poor devil like myself and it had been said of him. The time *Punch* ran the dramatic drawings down I never heard a word of it from him, and did not know he had seen it until I told him myself, when he smiled and said "not to bother your head about that". If he can tell you anything pleasant he does so, and certainly he never let me hear of any notices (and I know there have been some, from provincial sources at any rate) which were not complimentary. It is astonishing what a good heart shines in the breast of a society man like himself. . . . He's a brick.

As to *Punch*, a short diary kept by Hugh in the late 'eighties reveals the fact that for a month and more—from the 9th of November to the 11th of December of 1888—he had been occupying himself with four drawings for submission to the editor through the good offices of Comyns Carr. These were on his own selected subjects—a hunting sketch, a Sower, "The Wrastle", and "Inebriated Jarvey"—these, on completion, were duly remitted to Carr, after which we hear no more. We can guess, however, at the fate that must have befallen them. Some years afterwards—(following the publication of *The History of Punch* in 1895)—in pursuance of the standing invitation of the editor, Sir F. C. Burnand, to bring to his notice the names and work of humorous artists and writers worthy of *Punch*, yet whom he might have overlooked, the writer suggested that Hugh Thomson would be a great acquisition. He agreed, and Hugh was told of the readiness of *Punch* to come to an understanding with him. But Hugh explained that he shrank from the illustration of other people's jokes, which as likely as not might fail to appeal to him. Perhaps he was still feeling the indignity, as he would consider it, which had attended his earlier endeavour. In any case, the necessarily desultory nature of such work would be very likely to throw out of gear his more regular occupation with illustration. It must, nevertheless, have been a matter of some satisfaction to him that the rejector of yore had become the applicant of to-day.

It was not only at home that appreciative praise was reaching the artist. In a notice in the *Athenæum* of an unsatisfactory illustrated edition of Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* the



critic had suggested that the talents of Edwin Abbey or Fred Barnard might be suited to the work. Commenting on this, a writer in the *New York Tribune* replied: "The *Athenæum* need not go so far for an artist. It has Mr. Hugh Thomson at hand, the very man for the task. His eighteenth-century sketches show not only the finish and daintiness and thorough technical skill, but also an irresistible humour in which no modern draughtsman approaches him." This gratifying spontaneous tribute from afar was to have its sequel. The notice reached Hugh from Stewart Hunter by way of his father, for in one of his weekly letters to Kilrea he says: "It does indeed make me thankful to have such things said of my work, and I trust it may do us all good in the future. It is so much more than ever entered into my dreams of what I might do that I scarcely realised that it was not some friend who writes puffs. When I read the copy in your handwriting I took it at first to be a joke of your own, but of course it isn't that, and it is extremely flattering. Unless I change my mind I shall show it to Mr. Carr as a strange coincidence after his suggestion.<sup>1</sup> It is a pity that I had not had the paper, but no matter. Tell Stewart I'm much obliged for showing it to you and that when he and Bobby come over the champagne and oysters will be ready, even although the income tax isn't paid. . . . I wish I could trot over and see you. Of course you must expect me to be a little stand-offish, seein' as how I'm a' artis' coming out, but if you don't take any liberties I may thaw and condescend. I only need a few more (notices) from the North Pole or the Man in the Moon to make it past standing me."

In the same letter to his father—whose devotion to Gladstone did not survive that statesman's adoption of the Home Rule policy for Ireland—we have an expression of Hugh's own attitude, which, as all who knew him intimately were

<sup>1</sup> This suggestion had been made well before it appeared in the New York paper, for writing to his father a month earlier Hugh had said, "Did I tell you that in all probability I shall be illustrating *The Vicar of Wakefield* after I finish *Sir Roger*?"

aware, was that of a strong Home Ruler. The policy which rent Ireland was, however, never more than a subject of affectionate raillery between them. Commenting on a recent election, Hugh wrote:

Three cheers for Derry. It won't return a confounded Tory next time. I'm sorry to see you, my dear old daddy, such a Tory as you have become, but it is only what everybody says, that when people grow up in years and grow rich (eh) they turn Tory. Rest assured the



SIR ROGER "WITH ALL THE GAIETY OF FIVE AND TWENTY" FOLLOWING THE HARE TO ITS DESTINED RESCUE

*From "Days with Sir Roger de Coverley", published by Macmillan & Co., 1886*

Nationalists don't want separation. As for the lack of thrift if you read the history of past times you would find that England placed such restrictions on the industries of the southern part of Ireland that they were ruined (and these restrictions were in favour of the West of England trade, Ulster and the linen trade were never interfered with). The Irish in the South have no chance to be anything else but thriftless, depending as they are on the goodness or badness of the potato crop. You'll see Dear old Bill's way will be carried yet, if not by him by, perhaps, some of his direct opponents now, and it won't do Ulster any harm.



The prescience of that closing sentence is remarkable in the light of events of some thirty years later.



SIR ROGER DE COVERLEY

“Will Wimble” angling in the disputed hole

*From “Days with Sir Roger de Coverley”*

As regards the *Days with Sir Roger de Coverley*, which was published in time for the Christmas season, it is interesting to know that the artist sought all through to make the “Spectator” himself a portrait of Sir Richard Steele, founding the likeness on a print in the British Museum. In his weekly



letters home came many references to the progress of the work. The elder Thomson appears so often to have criticised horses as being drawn something short of equine perfection that Hugh was moved to protest: "There is one subject which I often wished to open on you about. You have made objections to Caldecott's horses, and others, and I think in this you seemed to blame them because they did not look thoroughbred, or at any rate were not perfect of their kind. Now I have always thought that you should allow in horses what you allow in drawings of men, viz. *character*, a short man and bandy legged, or long and lanky, or with a bottle nose, etc., one never objects to. Then why object to horses on the same count. I think Caldecott always got great character into his horses, and if they were not thoroughbred or perfect in their ways they looked very natural. There were such things as Roman-nosed brutes and so forth, and these should hardly be criticised from the standpoint of a perfect specimen of any kind." Later, in referring to the paper on *The Chase* (*E.I.M.*, August 1886), he said: "I read your criticisms with pleasure. I suppose from them that you think I have improved in the drawing of the horses. I did the 9 drawings in much the same time that I had done the other months, of course working with greater application and with much more interest than at any other series. If possible I should have liked about double the time to them and I might then have had better results. I entirely agree with all you say, and indeed the flank of the grey horse has been a mistake which I have now seen for some time."

After completing his drawings for the Christmas number of the *E.I.M.*, twenty extraordinarily able and vivid sketches from contemporary low life in London—in striking contrast with the Sir Roger work—Hugh paid a pleasant visit to the Comyns Carrs in their delightful cottage at Winchelsea, which aroused his enthusiasm—"I never was in a place delighted me so much. It would be a treasure to me in any further sketching I might do."

The year 1886 was a notable one in Hugh Thomson's life, the success he had attained being marked in many ways. American interest in his work was indicated in a long, entertainingly enthusiastic letter from a doctor in New York: "He has not made drawings which we see, but sensations which we feel, which allow us to forget such material objects as pencil, paper, lines and curves. I have felt nothing so pleasant as Mr. Thomson's suggestions in many a day, and I am convinced I am no more in love with them than would be anyone who enjoys to have his feelings carressed [*sic*]. Should the artist of *Days with Sir Roger de Coverley* care for the congratulations and thanks of an unknown he may be sure of *them*, and even more did I know how to offer it." The way in which the success was marked by offers of work is shown by a letter which Thomson addressed just before Christmas to his old Belfast friend, Vinycomb:

The other evening I had a note from Wm. Ward saying in effect that if I was open to do work other than for my present employer they (Marcus Ward & Co.) would be glad to hear from me. Of course I know nothing of Mr. W. Ward, but in being compelled to decline I made up my mind to write to you so that if you were made aware of the note and my reply you would not think it anything but an honest inability to break from Messrs. Macmillan. My best policy is to stick to them, and I only wish you could realise how decent they have been, more especially Mr. Comyns Carr, to whom I owe everything since I came to London. Since I left home a boy I have been more fortunate than I have either merited or could have expected in having friends like you and Mr. Carr. I believe you would never entertain the idea that I would not oblige, if possible, my old employers. In this case I have only replied to Mr. Ward as I have replied within the last two months to the *Graphic*, the *Pictorial World*, the new magazine the *Hour Glass*, Hildesheimer & Faulkner, Mawson Swan & Morgan, Tillotson & Sons and McClure and Macdonald, the latter about 9 months ago. These requests came to me, I have no doubt, through the Sir Roger drawings, which Messrs. Macmillan have published in book form, but I returned the same answer to them all. Apart from everything else it would be very shabby to break with Messrs. Macmillan on the completion of my first good work for them after advertising me during my term with them.

In the course of the same letter Hugh tells of a notable

dinner given by Mr. Frederick Macmillan at the Devonshire Club, at which he had been a guest:

After writing to Carey I am not equal to the enthusiasm which described my sensations on being introduced to Alma Tadema, Linley Sambourne, George Lewis, the solicitor, Whistler, Comyns Carr, Burne Jones, Austin Dobson, Smalley of the *New York Tribune*, Burnand, Edmund Yates. There were one or two more at the dinner,<sup>1</sup> in all 16. It took my breath away to sit down amongst such a lot, but as Austin Dobson and Burne Jones talked to me a good deal I enjoyed myself immensely and when not talking was looking round which was enjoyment enough. Frederick Macmillan knows these men even more I think through his Oxford career than through business. They are all a very jolly lot and Alma Tadema is quite a jocose boy, in a quiet dry way. He and Mr. Carr are great friends I believe, but indeed my editor is "one of the most popular men" in literary and art circles. . . . Certainly C. C. seemed the life of the party, with Whistler. Burnand was nowhere. Whistler "supplies most of the applause to his own jokes".

Again rallied by his cousin, Ellen Dodd, on his lack of enterprise, Hugh again emphatically stated that high-minded view which was simply natural to him, which self-seekers might regard as quixotic, but which was nothing more than a fair statement of the case:

I have had [he wrote] a "period of mental depression" over me (don't be frightened, it is not so bad as it looks). I have not been able to do my work to my mind of late, and the time has been spent trying to make up for my stupidity. Sometimes neither hand nor head can work out an idea, and a fit of the blues is cause and effect rolled into one, as I can never tell whether bad work gives me the blues, or blues the bad work.

I must devote this letter to myself and my affairs as you have put me on my defence against the charge of want of push. I don't know whether you have ever taken in hand a young servant girl and taught her cooking and all the arts of her calling, and been highly pleased when she asks for a considerable rise of wages, "I must give you a month's notice". Since I went to Macmillan's they have given me £5 a week, and advertised me liberally, in return for a fair amount of very poor work until Sir Roger de Coverley came along to the rescue, which is the only decent work I have as yet done, and the good and the bad of which you will find set forth in the enclosed criticism, which I consider the only review worth a rush which I have yet received on the book. It is written by a man who has evidently been trained as a draughtsman,

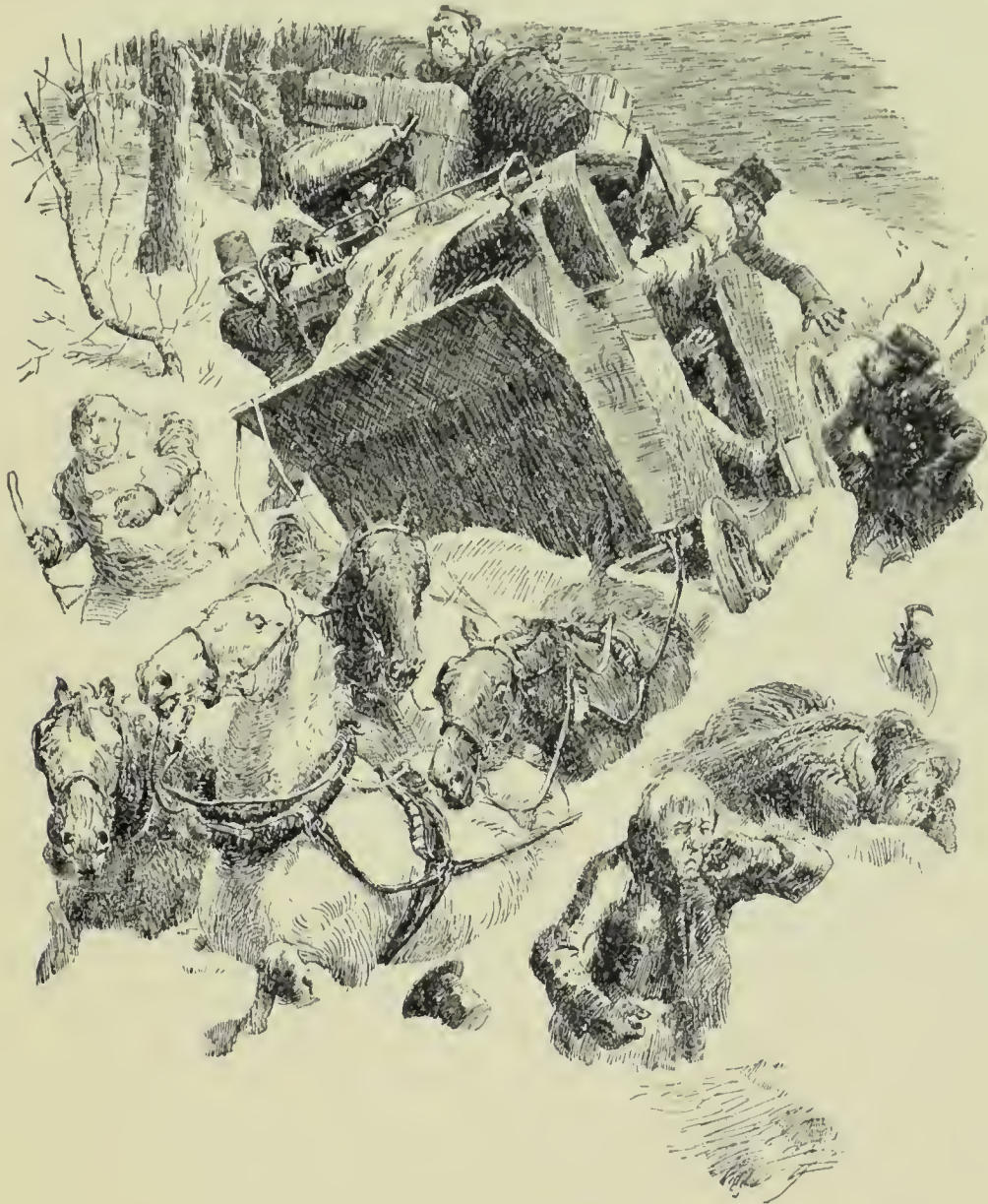
<sup>1</sup> These were John Tenniel, the Cartoonist of *Punch*, and Sir Morell Mackenzie, the eminent surgeon.



whether for an art critic or an artist does not matter. And it is as kindly and encouraging as it is plain spoken. So you will see, dear Ellen, that I am not as yet, nor won't be for some time, a first-class artist, nor one who can demand his own very liberal terms. . . . I really don't think that, at the completion of the first good work I have done it would be decent in me to—in fact to increase the rent on the tenants' improvements. How would anybody have seen my work if the capital to print and publish it had not been supplied? . . . Macmillans post them (press notices) to me as they come in, it being the form to send the author the critiques. As this author is in heaven, they send the poor devil of an artist the remarks. As a general rule, the text is run down and the pictures lauded. I am glad poor Addison is in his grave. . . . I intend, if all goes well, to give Macmillans at least another year of my time. They will not be overpaid with that.

Before the close of 1886 there had been talk, as we have seen, of giving Hugh Thomson the pleasant task of illustrating Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. Comyns Carr, apparently first bruited it in May, then came the American critic's pointed remark, but the matter remained in abeyance, as rumour had it that Abbey was already engaged on the work. Meanwhile the artist continued his consideration of eighteenth-century literature, and began illustrating a series of old songs and ballads, and letters to Austin Dobson show him consulting that great authority on the period. Swift's *Morning in London*, Gay's *A Journey to Exeter*, and the anonymous *Captain (of Militia) Sir Dilberry Diddle*, had already appeared, when the happy series was interrupted by the acceptance of a number of articles by W. Outram Tristram, the illustrating of which was entrusted jointly to Hugh Thomson and Herbert Railton. The subject was *Coaching Days and Coaching Ways*, and to Thomson fell the providing of the subject and action pictures, while Railton vignetted old buildings, etc., along the great coaching roads of which the author gossiped. This series—to which Hugh contributed fifty drawings—was published as a separate volume in the autumn of 1888, and the way in which Thomson's work dominated that of his colleagues is to be gauged from a recent reference to this first edition of the work as "the most sought-for Hugh Thomson". Writing

to Vinycomb, Hugh had said: "I must send you a copy of *Coaching Days* when it is published. Macmillans have given it a most sumptuous casket in the way of big print and



IN A SNOWDRIFT

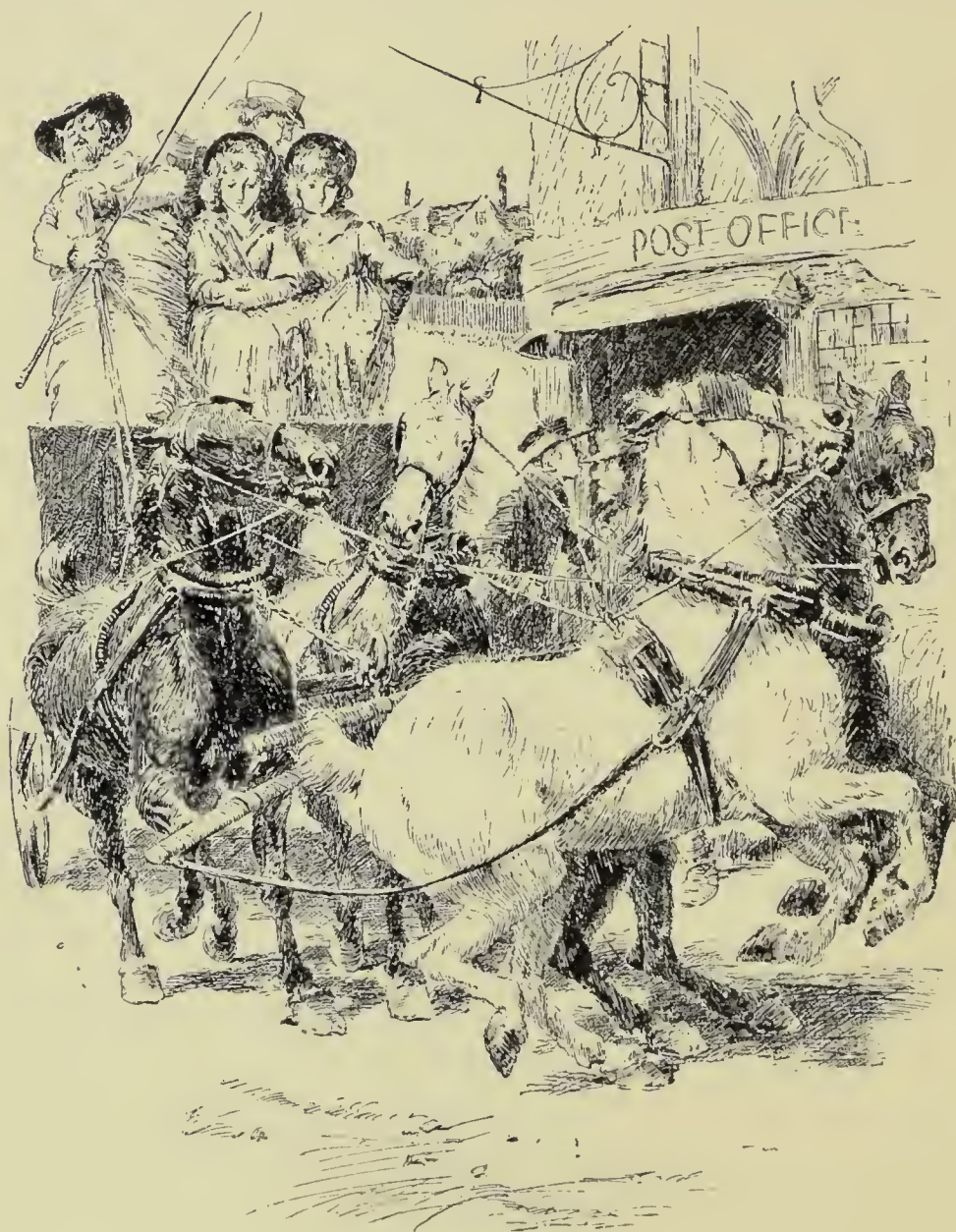
*From "Coaching Days and Coaching Ways", by W. Outram Tristram,  
published by Macmillan & Co., 1888*

margins. There are also some 7 or 8 more drawings which I made for the book and which did not appear serially, and I consider them better than all that went before."

There is no doubt that *Coaching Days* remains to this day



one of the most popular of Hugh's books. The monthly parts had appeared from October 1887 to July 1888, and towards



TAKING UP THE MAILS

*From "Coaching Days and Coaching Ways", by W. Outram Tristram*

the end of the year they were issued in volume form. Later on, in 1903, the book reappeared in reduced size in the series of "Illustrated Pocket Classics", and it has several times been



reprinted. Its popularity was further proved by the production (with the publisher's permission), by the old Staffordshire potters, Ridgways, of a long series of what they call "Coaching Days ware"—comprising plates and dishes and jugs and the like, in various sizes, reproducing pen-and-ink drawings as nearly facsimile as the process of manufacture would allow. Drawings in pen and ink are not generally regarded as suitable for the decoration of "china"; and the artist had little liking for it when he saw it. Yet so able and distinguished a "pen-and-ink man" as Mr. James F. Sullivan writes to declare himself "the delighted owner of a tea-equipment in brown earthenware", adding that "the effect of Hugh Thomson's work, even in this medium, bears out my impressions of the man", after making his acquaintance at the Savage Club. "Of his work as an illustrator", he goes on, "my feeling takes the form of undiluted admiration. He was the roundest of round pegs in the roundest of round holes, and his spirit and style seemed to me to fit the works he illustrated to a degree unattained by any other draughtsman that occurs to my mind."

*Coaching Days* completed, the artist went back to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poets, and illustrated Walton's *Angler's Song*, *Coridon's Song*, *A Hunting We Will Go*, and other lyrics.<sup>1</sup> He had hoped to include in his series of songs *Kitty of Coleraine*, and "never was so disappointed" as at finding himself forestalled by Abbey, who illustrated it in *Harper's*. He also, it would seem, contemplated including Austin Dobson's *Ballad of Beau Brocade* in the series, for at the end of 1887 he wrote thanking Dobson for permission to illustrate it, and saying that he was "bubbling over" to begin the work, and, further, that Comyns Carr was delighted. The *Beau* was not completed for the magazine, but out of this proposal doubtless, later, developed the illustrating of volumes of Dobson's poems.

<sup>1</sup> These illustrated poems from various sources were published by themselves as *Coridon's Song and Other Verses* in 1894.

In February 1888 the Thomsons gave up the little house in Erpingham Road, stored their furniture, and took their small boy John down to Winchelsea, where the Carrs had lent them their cottage for three months. In March, Hugh was again in town with the Carrs for some days making sketches for the programme of Carr's play, *The Pompadour*, which Beerbohm Tree was producing at the Haymarket Theatre.

As they neared the end of their stay at Winchelsea they looked about for seaside rooms, which they found at Pelham Place, Seaford, and took for five months—remaining for ten. The more specialised work which Hugh was for the most part doing for the *E.I.M.* after the success of *Sir Roger* enabled him to work away from town, and he delighted in the fresh air and open country of the Sussex coast. While there he made his first illustrations for the *Graphic*, his engagement with the Macmillans being relaxed for the purpose, for writing to his father (August 2, 1888) he said: "Railton<sup>1</sup> suggested some time ago that Tristram, he, and myself should join in writing and illustrating a story, and he, knowing that Thomas of the *Graphic* was anxious to have some of my work, showed some 'cuteness in this. Tristram wrote the tale on Thomas promising to take it and I am engaged illustrating it.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Carr allowed me to undertake it and told me not to ask less than 10 guineas a drawing, so that I am to get £52 : 10s. for 5 drawings. They pay Railton and Tristram the same. Railton I suppose will dot the page over with many drawings of the moat house which figures in the tale."

When March 1889 came round Hugh Thomson had completed five years' work with Messrs. Macmillan. How this phase of his career reached its close may best be shown in a letter which Hugh sent to his father (March 22, 1889) with a headline in large writing:

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Railton (1850–1910), the admirable pen-and-ink illustrator, who specialised in the "out-door architectural".

<sup>2</sup> It was a "thriller" called *The Moat House*, which, when reissued in volume form in 1894, was renamed *The King of Hearts*.



*W. J. Kilpatrick, Belfast*

Stewart Hunter  
Ob. 1897



*J. Russell & Sons*

Austin Dobson, LL.D.  
1840-1921



*Stereoscopic Co.*

Joseph Comyns Carr  
1849-1916



*Elliott & Fry, Ltd.*

Sir Frederick Macmillan, C.V.O.  
B. 1851

FOUR OF HUGH THOMSON'S MOST HELPFUL FRIENDS





*Be prepared for fairly good news in this letter*

MY DEAREST FATHER—As I have some news to give this week I do not wait for your letter, but having finished some work attack the telling of it at once. Perhaps some paragraph in the papers may have reached you (as very often they are copied from one to another) to the effect that Mr. Carr is going to resign the editorship of the *English Illustrated*. He has so many irons in the fire—in the New Gallery which is a great success, and producing plays at the theatres, work which I am sure he prefers infinitely to editing. When I was told that he was going to resign I had an interview with Frederick Macmillan and we came to an arrangement by which I take a more independent stand, and after the 30th of June my present arrangement with the *English Illustrated* ceases and I can take work all round. At present I am commencing a set of drawings for the *Graphic*, and when the 30th of June comes Frederick is to give me a commission to illustrate the *Vicar of Wakefield*, being paid for my drawings on such a scale as we may agree to. Comyns Carr had partly arranged it for me, and I had no difficulty or unpleasantness. I believe and trust that now I shall begin to make a better income, I shall not feel the same interest in the magazine after Mr. Carr gives it up, and I expect it will be a more energetic and wholesome way of work. Thanks to God and to Comyns Carr I can now stand on my own legs, pretty certain that there is a plentiful demand for anything I can do, and the only thing I regret is that I shall most certainly not be able to keep up to all I shall be asked to do in another year or two. I expect I shall manage all right the first year or two and then have to run up my prices to a most royal standard. Let us hope it is *more* than a joke. . . .

I send you a sheet of the *Pall Mall* giving a notice of Walter Crane's concluding lecture, principally that you may see my name figuring. It is a nice little advertisement for me at this time. There were two of my drawings thrown on the sheet from the magic lantern, the first the title-page of the *Angler's Song* (Xmas No.) and the title-page of *Morning in London*.

In this letter Hugh has become relatively composed after the shock of the previous week in respect of Comyns Carr's retirement from the editorship of the *English Illustrated Magazine*. When first he heard of it he was profoundly grieved, and it was under the stress of deep emotion that he wrote the following letter—the expression of genuine sorrow and of the warmest unaffected gratitude.

2 SCHUBERT ROAD, WEST HILL,  
PUTNEY, *March 14.*

DEAR MR. CARR—I have heard that you intend giving up the Editorship of the *English Illustrated*. I do not know your reasons nor are they my business, but I cannot tell you strongly enough how sorry and dismayed I have been at the prospect of serving under anybody but yourself. And I don't think that I would care to.

Any good which is in my work is your creation, and it has been a delight to me to be, so far as my limited power went, always your servant who owes everything to you. It is not natural that I can feel so under any other Editor. *I feel very differently.* You have been the best and most steadfast friend and Governor to me. I know how in the past you helped and stood up for me, and it is owing to you that I feel that now, I can stand on my own legs so far as a market for my work goes. I simply owe everything to you. At the same time I do not forget that Mr. Frederick Macmillan has always been a very good friend to me, but of course that kindness came through you. I would not like him to think that I was ungrateful. It will, in all probability be the firm's desire or the new editor's, that I should go, and so I am glad to have an opportunity of telling you that it would also be pleasanter for me to contribute in a different way under the new state of things, if they ever did allow me to contribute. . . .

I thought I could write much better what I felt, but I have not been able. However I am glad that I *have* written and that you will understand all that is unwritten.—Your ever faithful and grateful,

HUGH THOMSON.

J. COMYNS CARR, Esq.

Several of Hugh Thomson's drawings appeared in the *E.I.M.* after his engagement came to an end—many of them done during the period of his agreement, to illustrate articles the publication of which was long deferred, and some of them specially commissioned. The last numbers of the magazine in which he was represented were those for November 1891—two drawings of Chalfont St. Giles, done more than six years earlier—and January 1892, three drawings to an article on *Village Life in the Olden Time*, the last of which, "A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game", may well stir regrets that Hugh Thomson did not seek further inspiration in the pages of Elia.



Early in 1889 the Thomsons returned to London, taking a house at 2 Schubert Road, Putney; as Hugh wrote: "We wend our way back to London away from which some people cannot live, and which I like in small doses at certain times of the year. Otherwise, having been born and bred a country boy I think I shall always remain so. It isn't so much that I am fond of colour and sketching, because that can be had nowhere better than in London. I like to sit amongst quiet landscapes, not roaring ones. It is one of the most astonishing things to me the love which most men to whom I have spoken about it bear to London. Old Mr. Wm. Simpson, when I first spoke to him, gave me a year to like it, but I escaped in about three months down to open suburbs and missed my chance."

He here refers to William Simpson, R.I., who was born in Scotland in 1823, and was the able special artist of the *Illustrated London News* who had begun his career as "pictorial correspondent" at the Crimea in 1854, and afterwards developed it in all the four quarters of the globe. And yet his topographical love was centred in London!

## CHAPTER III

### RISE TO THE FOREMOST RANK

#### THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD AND CRANFORD

1889-1893



ON the termination of Hugh Thomson's formal engagement with Messrs. Macmillan the freedom of being able to undertake work where he would be welcomed, though the comfort of an assured salary was replaced by the inevitable anxiety attendant on maintaining an income from free-lancing. The artist was fortunate in starting this new stage of his progress with a commission from his late employers for a piece of work in which he found sheer joy, and with other illustration in hand and in prospect. The commission was one for doing a lavish number of illustrations for Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. This Hugh had greatly desired to undertake, and when the commission was only "almost" decided on, he wrote to Austin Dobson to say that "it will be necessary to me to get your opinion on the set of single figures which I mean to begin with, conceptions of the various characters to which I shall stick throughout the book (if possible)".

For close upon eighteen months the *Vicar* dominated everything. Other work was sandwiched in from time to time, but the artist's letters reveal how whole-heartedly he was engaged in the task of rendering pictorially the scenes and characters of the tenderest romance left to us by the eighteenth century. Within a fortnight of receiving the com-

The Initial letter is from *Cranford*, published by Macmillan & Co., 1891.

mission he wrote: "Jackson Moore and I purpose, if Sunday is fine, going down to the Surrey town of Dorking which is about an hour's ride from town and there having a walk. The scenery and old cottages sprinkled over the country are, I am told, very fine. In fact you will remember Biscombe Gardner's drawings of Surrey mill-wheels, and again in last



*Photo: Naudin*

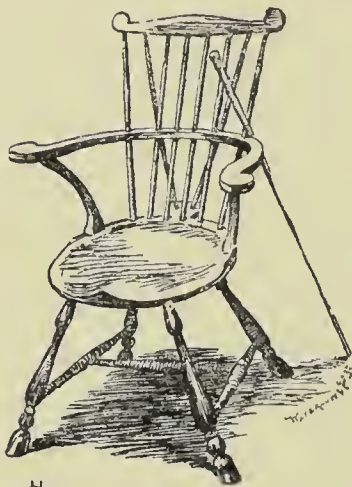
HUGH THOMSON IN 1890

Christmas number of Surrey farmhouses. Well, the walk we are going on is that recommended by the author, Grant Allen, in the former of these two articles. I will be keeping my eye open for a view which would suit for the Vicar's little cottage with its elms 'appearing with inexpressible beauty' as the Vicar puts it. Did you ever read the tale? The descriptions are most charming, that of the little cottage home being exquisite. And the life by the fireside on the evenings reminds me of the delightful sensations I used to have with Uncle Hugh at Ballygobbin." Many of the drawings were to be



done, however, before the "Vicar's little cottage" was discovered.

After making a start on the new work there came the welcome break of a holiday in Ireland, and a greatly enjoyed tramping trip with his father round the Antrim coast, but the Vicar was not forgotten, and the search for the not impossible cottage-model was continued, although, when writing to Austin Dobson in October, Hugh said, "I have been over



GOLDSMITH'S CHAIR AND CANE  
From "*The Vicar of Wakefield*"

in Ireland for the last two months or so, and have given the Vicar a rest as I did not need to turn the poor old fellow into money". He had, of course, from time to time to detach himself for various pot-boiling tasks, while at work on the Vicar, but "wherever he went [wrote his wife to a friend] the book went too, and he used to come in from his walk over Wimbledon Common, announcing he had found another subject, and had it mapped out, and was going to start on it at once. It was a real labour of love. The commission

was for 120 drawings, but when he had completed those he went on and on for his own satisfaction, until he had done altogether 183." When the first of the drawings was completed Hugh had the most heartening encouragement from his good friends Comyns Carr and Austin Dobson. The former procured him the sight of the dresses used in Irving's Lyceum production of *Olivia*, and the latter set about a study of Goldsmith's earlier illustrators for the *E.I.M.*, and Hugh, who, at his request, accompanied him to the South Kensington Museum to select specimens for illustrating it,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Vicar of Wakefield and Its Illustrators, E.I.M.*, October 1890; with the sly "moral" that "one is forced to the conclusion that Goldsmith has not yet found his fitting pictorial interpreter"—a wholly justifiable use of the puff preliminary by implication, seeing what the publishers of the *E.I.M.* had nearly ready for issue.

learned with delight that *his* "Vicar" was to have an introduction by Dobson.

Writing to his father (May 23, 1890), Hugh described how he was getting the "Vicar" through, how it was going to be a tremendous book in the number of illustrations, and how he was introducing dogs and horses here and there so as to emphasise the country surroundings of the story. "You remember the search I had for a cottage for the Vicar when I was over. Curiously enough the very thing I wanted was at my hand all the time in the sketch which I made of the lock gates. Just as it stands the cottage on the far side with its clumps of aspen trees, and the Bann below the eel-traps seen beyond, is the very thing. The description in the book is of a thatched cottage with a sloping field and a prattling river below. So . . . the Bann will be immortalised in my book, you see. To do the thing properly I should have had the Revd. Stewart's meeting-house in also as the Vicar's church. I got a beautiful old church up the Thames which suited it splendidly, with a lych-gate and an ivy-grown tree beside it. I have made quite a little pet of the book and if it isn't a success it won't be my fault because I have tried my hardest. I suppose, though, as I think so much of the book myself that it will repay me in that way, giving me all the pleasure I hoped for. Nobody will see so many beauties in it as I do myself, unfortunately. I wish they did."

To Austin Dobson he wrote (on the 10th of June): "I have seized on the last of the hawthorn to design the cover for the Vicar. The subject I have taken is the two blackbirds answering each other from opposite hedges. This enables me to run a spray up the side with the bloom on it. . . . When the East wind left us there was a distinct change for the better in my work. . . . I am pegging away to get the book through. I shall leave it with sorrow." And a little later, to the same friend, after having shown him the latest batch of drawings: "It was delightful encouragement that you gave me yesterday, and it makes me feel nervous lest I fall behind in the



march onward. The latter half of the Vicar never did appeal to me so much as the elms and meadows of the first. I rejoice



"Are you the hearer  
of this here letter?"

H. Thomson  
Sep 22.

*From "The Vicar of Wakefield", published by Macmillan and Co., 1890  
(Showing the early influence of E. A. Abbey, R.A., in manner and execution)*

to think that there are many subjects in this part to be done yet, and I will brace myself to make the most, according to my ability, of the last part of the book." And then again:



“For a long time I have been meditating a descent on you with a bundle of Vicar drawings, but have never been able to collect them together. Before giving them all a look over I meant to ask your advice and suggestion and have been collecting the various drawings here at home so that I might have the work, till now, as complete as possible. I have tried hard to make the illustrations for the latter part of the book equal to the first and am so far uncertain about them that your opinion is anxiously looked forward to. I detest the prison walls as heartily as Mr. Jenkinson but cannot get over the idea that it is the draughtsman’s mission to make them as interesting as the green field and the cottage fireside.”

As the book with which he had so lovingly lived for many months past approached the hour for publication the artist’s nervous apprehension concerning his performances betrayed itself as usual in anxious wondering as to how that work would be regarded by the public. It was his first big thing produced as an unattached artist—and everything appeared to depend upon whether its reception were favourable or otherwise. It was doubtless of the Vicar drawings that he wrote, within a week of the book’s appearance, expressing himself as overjoyed at the kind, encouraging things said by Austin Dobson: “There is not another soul but one whose opinion is worth anything who cares to throw me a crumb of encouragement. And one does not know how one hankers for it until it comes. I did not sleep for three or four hours last night after going to bed—for pleasure at what you said.”

On December 2, 1890, Hugh Thomson’s *Vicar of Wakefield* was published. It made an instant hit, being recognised on all hands that, most appropriately in one of his own countrymen, Oliver Goldsmith had at long last found “his fitting pictorial interpreter.” On December 11 the editor of the volume wrote to its artist:

MY DEAR THOMSON—I must send a line to congratulate you upon the *Vicar*. I got it this afternoon, and have been studying it with the keenest delight. If it is not very popular, I shall be very much surprised;

but in any case it is work of which you can never be ashamed—full of invention, fancy and clever characterisations, charming in its glimpses of landscape and pictures of children, and everywhere loyal to Goldsmith's text. How I wish he could have seen it! I think in his joy he would have sung you—"Ah me! when shall I marry me?" or "The Three Jolly Pigeons".—With best wishes, yours always,

AUSTIN DOBSON.

Just before Christmas Hugh was able to report that within three weeks the first large edition was sold out. He did so in the course of a charming letter to his father, which we must give ourselves the pleasure of citing, in part, as it is representative of the hundreds which paternal pride so happily preserved (December 22, 1890):

MY DEAREST FATHER—You were, I fear, rather disgusted with me when you found that I had not written you my usual weekly, especially as the season of the year demands something in the way of good wishes, and to no one does a hearty wish from me go more readily than to you. May you have a happy Christmas and a bright and prosperous New Year, and may your dear old eyes live to see many more. . . .

As for myself, I have undoubtedly made a success. The "Vicar", both in the small edition of 5000 and the large paper of 300 (at 30/-) is out of print, and the partners are not too well pleased that the second edition is not ready. The reason for that is that after the first big orders it has been selling at the rate of 300 copies per day and during the Christmas season that sale would have gone on. Now, when the booksellers' agents come in they are told "out of print" and the sale of 300 each day is stopped for lack of material. The 2nd edition will not be ready till the first week in January.<sup>1</sup> Of course the term out of print means that the publisher is sold out; the booksellers in the country, no doubt, have the book still on their shelves, but the public must be buying it or the repeated orders would not come in. They predict in Macmillans that in half-a-dozen years a copy of the first edition, published at 6/- will sell to book collectors at 35/- or maybe £3. Many people who know of this sort of rise speculate in a book of the sort, keeping the copies by them. Macmillans are all greatly pleased about it.<sup>2</sup> . . .

John (in his fifth year) is of course full of tremendous sayings and plenty of impudence. He and I during this snowy weather have a game

<sup>1</sup> On February 11 he reported "some 1300 of the second edition sold".

<sup>2</sup> Letters from appreciative strangers succeeded rapidly on each publication. An American admirer wrote to the artist shortly after the *Vicar* was published: "It seems to me Goldsmith must ache to communicate with you for interpreting the tale".

of football up in my long room to make our blood circulate, usually after breakfast, and again before he goes to bed. He has got to play very well, and I was startled the other day by his uttering this injunction—"Come, wake up, old man". I *did* wake up, I can tell you, and played with great vigour. Last Sunday we went over with him to Hutt's and spent the day. He had never, I think, been in the train at night before, as when coming home, and sitting in the carriage on my knee (it was full of people) he said, "Is this the underground railway?" "No," said I. "Is it the upperground?" "No," said I. Then he rolled his eyes about, thinking, and then said he, "Is it not a wonder that God allows them to make holes through the ground to run their railways in, spoiling the ground like that?" Everybody was convulsed of course at the young thinker.

I will now close, sending my love to all. May Granny, Mary and yourself have a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year, and God bless you, dear old father, is the prayer of your loving son,

HUGH.

*P.S.* I was pained and shocked to read that you had gone out to a wake. I thought that you had had enough warning about the danger of night outings like that. Do be careful, for our sakes.

And thus *The Vicar* brought joy to the public, satisfaction to the publishers, and contentment—and a good deal more—to the House of Thomson. As to one detail in the book, a word will be expected by bibliographers, First-Edition Clubmen, and collectors of "suppressed plates"—of whom George S. Layard was one. On page 95 of the issues of *The Vicar*, in 1890, illustrating the last words, "Upon this we rested our petition", there appears a young woman reading the said petition, perched upon her Cousin Thornhill's shoulders, who, stooping, is giving her "a back". No reviewer and no correspondent—and probably scarcely a single reader in all the many thousands—raised any objection to the drawing on the ground of delicacy or refinement; but, as Hugh Thomson wrote to Mr. Layard, who was at that time engaged on his researches which resulted in his book, *Suppressed Plates*,<sup>1</sup> and so was interested in the suppression of the design in the next edition: "My own reason was the remarks of a friend. I had, I suppose, as lively an imagination as he, and conjured

<sup>1</sup> *Suppressed Plates*, by George Somes Layard. (A. & C. Black, 1907.)



up the objections which might be made to it. . . . One or two of my acquaintances", he goes on, "who have a great deal to do with the fine old English novel . . . suggested that the little tailpiece was in rather bad taste. As the slightest suspicion of such an imputation was too much for me, I hastened to



*From "The Vicar of Wakefield" (Macmillan & Co. Ltd.)*

Original tailpiece to p. 95, suppressed by the artist by reason of suspicion of lack of delicacy.

Tailpiece in the second and all later editions—showing Lady Blarney and Miss Caroline W. A. Skeggs.

remove the offender and to substitute another, irreproachable." A tribute, surely, to Mr. and Mrs. Grundy alike! And so a pretty little drawing of Lady Blarney and Miss Caroline W. A. Skeggs now fills the space: they are shown walking along a road by a wall on which is posted the "Petition" which in the earlier drawing is held up by the girl aloft on her cousin's back.

It is not surprising, the love of Goldsmith having grown strong upon him, that Hugh should have confided to Austin Dobson his yearning to illustrate yet another masterpiece of the creator of the *Vicar*: "How I long for the power and the opportunities in landscape which would enable one to illustrate such a poem as *The Traveller*", wrote he. "The music of those first lines always sends a thrill through me, which kindles a mad desire to do what is beyond me. If one were a millionaire and Turner were alive and willing to illustrate it what a work it would make. He was the only man who could express by light and shade and form the effects which the fine poet can so bring before one with a few words."

His aspiration was not destined to be fulfilled. At the same time the immediate success of the *Vicar* had more than ratified the position which Hugh Thomson had taken already among modern illustrators through the *Sir Roger de Coverley* and his contributions which imparted active life to the *Coaching Days and Coaching Ways*. In bringing together the story of that success we have had to pass over other things that necessitate a brief harking-back. On returning from the visit to Ireland in the autumn of 1889 Hugh had set to work on illustrating Sir John Suckling's *Ballad on a Wedding*, and the spirited drawings appeared in the *Art Journal*.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is remarkable how much other work was done between whiles during the time the artist was primarily absorbed in the *Vicar*. In sending his father the *Art Journal* (January 10, 1890), he said: "At present I am engaged on some work which Thomas of the *Graphic* gave me to do. It will always bring grist to the mill. Then one of these days I will be commencing another article for the *English Illustrated*, *Some Board School Children*. I will be going to one or two of the schools and making studies." A few days later and he recorded having visited the Deptford Board School, and found both boys and girls "wretchedly clad", their rags of boots "clinging

<sup>1</sup> Strangely enough the same poem, with all Hugh's illustrations, apparently from the same blocks, reappeared in the opening number of *The New Budget* in 1895.



one does not know how to the feet", worse than the bare feet of poor Irish children. At the end of February he was still at work for the *Graphic*, on an idea Mr. Thomas had given him; but on this occasion he worked with apprehension, as he shied at being his own author as well as illustrator.<sup>1</sup>



THE BOARD SCHOOL GATE

For J. Runciman's article "Some School-Board Children". (Much reduced)

(*English Illustrated Magazine*, 1890)

*Four Innocents Abroad*, and Hugh, full of enjoyment, made upwards of a dozen more or less hurried sketches, mostly from memory, to illustrate it.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after their return, too, he made for the same periodical, and "in a day or

With Mr. Ernest Brown (later of the Leicester Galleries), Mr. Herbert Baker (a Fleet Street friend), and a Mr. Hart, he set off and had a joyous week's wandering in Holland, which to him was all new and delightful. Of Amsterdam he declared that never had he been amongst anything so beautiful as its streets and canals: "Nowhere is there to be seen such glorious pictures. I had had no idea before what the Old Masters were like. Simply wonderful." Of this trip Herbert Baker wrote an account, *The*

<sup>1</sup> This would doubtless be Hugh's contribution for the *Graphic's* following Christmas number, a four-page coloured supplement setting forth *How Jacky Marlinspike Returned Home for Christmas Pudding*. The story was developed in a series of twelve drawings, the accompanying text being also the work of the artist.

<sup>2</sup> *Pall Mall Budget*, April 1890.



less", an unaccustomed essay in the form of a cartoon to accompany a paper on "How to Become Wealthy", by Andrew Carnegie;<sup>1</sup> and on Whit Monday he was making sketches of the holiday folk at Hampton Court for the *Graphic*. With that finished, he busied himself with a variety of other work, including a series of drawings for the St. Valentine's Day issue of *Black and White*, an illustrated weekly that was to start on the 6th of February of 1891, drawings which are, he says, "elaborate and taking a lot of time, but if they are successful that does not matter". It was all he ever did for *Black and White*, as the directors of the *Graphic* not unnaturally felt that a competitor was poaching upon its preserves. "I hope that *Black and White* will not take it badly", wrote Hugh to Mr. Ernest Brown. "I can hardly think so, because they have practically all the first men of the day. That man Partridge is a host in himself, not to speak of the other young men."

"About a week ago I handed in a set of drawings to Thomas of the *Graphic*.<sup>2</sup> And they have been asking me to make illustrations for half a dozen poems at Bedford Street (Macmillans) so that the *English Illustrated* may have some work of mine in next year." Presumably pressure of other work prevented this, for in the *E.I.M.* during 1891 Hugh was represented only by eight illustrations of London cabs and cabmen—admirable studies full of subtle character and fun—and the two drawings of Chalfont done some years before.

At the end of November the artist attended one of those large social gatherings which, in most cases, he sought to avoid—a dinner to Mr. W. L. Thomas, to celebrate in one festivity the Coming of Age of the *Graphic* (which he had founded) and the birth-year of the *Daily Graphic* (likewise his creation), at which upwards of 250 people were present,

<sup>1</sup> *Pall Mall Budget*, May 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly the draft of his contribution for the 1891 Christmas number, *Mr. Jollyboy's Bachelor Party*, a four-page coloured supplement, embodying nine illustrations with accompanying text by the artist.

and Hugh was well pleased to find himself sitting close to William Black and Walter Besant, William Small and a few other notabilities, with Thomas Hardy facing him.

Of course the *Vicar* had to have a successor. At the opening of the year 1891 Hugh wrote that "the new book



REPARTEE

For W. Outram Tristram's "*Cabs and their Drivers*"  
(*English Illustrated Magazine*, 1891)

for illustration is very nearly settled on, and I think it will be Miss Mitford's *Our Village*, a series of papers on rural life and character which I hope to be able to grasp thoroughly and begin upon presently. I hope and trust it will be as good a success as the *Vicar*, but that seems almost too much to hope for." A few days later, and he has to tell that another book has been decided upon—that he has been at the British Museum, looking up costumes of about 1840 for *Cranford*,



and is going to the Criterion to see a play of the period for the same purpose. It is also suggested, he says, that he should do fifty illustrations for a volume of Austin Dobson's poems: "It will mean that I will have to make 150 by August or September, nearly at the rate of one per day". Before the end of January Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co. had commissioned the illustrations for *The Ballad of Beau Brocade and Other Poems* by Mr. Dobson, for which he was to receive £150.

In February came a joint exhibition, at the Fine Art Society in New Bond Street, of work by Kate Greenaway and Hugh Thomson's *Vicar of Wakefield* drawings, which were exhibited by the publishers, whose property they were, with the addition of some of the extra ones that remained the artist's own. Sending his father an early copy of the catalogue—"which treasure as you would a precious manuscript by Aristotle"—Hugh makes merry over the capital preface by Lionel Robinson, in so far as it refers to himself and his early surroundings; it is not quite accurate, and he regrets that the writer has not introduced Ballygobbin: "I specially repeated it to him so that he might be tempted by the picturesque Fenian sound of it. I thought it would make the Saxon reader sit up." In a letter to Mr. Ernest Brown, then of the Fine Art Society, he wrote: "The catalogue has just come in and of course I have devoured the romantic life of the great man written therein. But what an extraordinarily new light Mr. Robinson has thrown on me. I scarcely know myself." All the same, we must bear witness that to the well-informed reader there is nothing absurd and little indeed misrepresented, as Hugh in his modesty would claim. He and his wife went up to the private view when, despite the fog which he describes as the plague of "Eastern Darkness", there were a great number of people at the gallery, "most of them, of course, to see Miss Greenaway's drawings. . . . When Jessie and I got there about 4.15 (I did not feel like missing a whole day) the rooms were crowded and we could scarcely force our way through. However, I got at last to Brown and he



introduced us to Miss Greenaway, and after that I was in a whirl, because no sooner did I begin to talk to somebody whom Brown brought up than he brought another person, and what between our own acquaintances and the new



*Dallas photo*

MR. JOHN THOMSON, HIS SON HUGH, AND GRANDSON JOHN. 1889

people I wished heartily that I had never come near the place."

A couple of days later Hugh wrote to Austin Dobson, referring to a notice of the *Vicar* in the *Saturday Review*: "Such a kindly notice makes me very grateful and very

frightened that the reviewer will be disgusted with the next work which he may see. However, by that time he may have forgotten that he ever thought well of this." He goes on to say that he is starting on Dobson's poems "with timidity", fearful that he may not be able to give the dainty tone to the delightful pictures they call up.

Then the Horse Show at Islington came in March. "I did not think there were so many perfectly shaped brutes in the world", he says in describing them at length for the benefit of his horse-loving father. There followed an opportunity of going to Dartmouth "to see Randolph Churchill on his South African tour, but I declined. Excursions of that kind unsettle one for a week after. . . . In many ways I should have liked to go . . . but more real satisfaction is had from staying at home and feeling as well on Saturday morning as one does on Friday. . . . At present I am working on a couple of drawings for the *Graphic*, having promised them, otherwise I could not have done them, being pressed by the two books (*Cranford* and *Beau Brocade*) which will take me all my time to turn out by October." In search of "backgrounds" for one of the Dobson poems, Hugh set out with Herbert Baker for a week-end at Penshurst, but, on reaching the station and seeing an announcement of a cheap week-end to Boulogne, they went there instead and he got backgrounds for another of the poems, and the trip to Penshurst was postponed.

These weekly long letters, among which we get notes on work being done as well as such family talk designed to please the recipient (and the writer), show Hugh's simple home-loving humorous character, his delight in children—typified of course in his little son John—his love of the country, and of his dog-companion, Mick. They show also his dislike for all big social gatherings, which not only put a tax on time, but also proved unsettling to him in breaking the contemplative continuity which he found so necessary and so delightful.





“WE SEDULOUSLY TALKED TOGETHER”

*From “Cranford”, by Mrs. Gaskell, published by Macmillan & Co., 1891*

“You must not be angry and call me ungrateful”, he writes on one occasion, “if I tell you that I chortled in my joy when an ample excuse came to hand whereby we avoided the dreaded evening party—the anticipation of which (having to take some swell young lady to supper



and not knowing what to ask for) had hung over me like a dread thing for the three weeks that we have had the invitation. Well, Mr. Miller [Mrs. Thomson's father, who was staying with them at Putney] has the influenza, had to take to his bed on Monday afternoon and though happily it is a mild attack yet it has brought him very low and weak and kept him in bed ever since. So I put it to Jessie, was it right that we should go amongst the great poets and painters and run the risk of giving them influenza, so poor Jessie's conscience said it would not, and I got out of the ordeal. So I passed a happy day yesterday instead of dreaming and dreading that fashionable young woman with her healthy appetite for various curiously named dainties. It was maybe selfish in me for Jessie is greatly interested, as indeed I am, in seeing the famous people who go there, but it was as well, seeing that we had a genuine excuse."

As the year 1891 advanced he felt troubled by the rival claims of the work in hand: the undertaking of two important books, for full illustration simultaneously, did not conduce to that untroubled quiet in which he worked best. The realisation that he might not get the work done in time fidgeted him so that his habit of making several essays in the constant effort to get at something better still was emphasised. In the summer his wife was in Ireland for a holiday, and the way in which her absence affected him is suggested by the words, written after her return early in July: "At last it seemed like home, which it was very unlike for two or three weeks". The somewhat gloomy feeling which had taken possession of him is reflected in a letter written at this time to Austin Dobson.

Towards the end of July Hugh and his wife had a pleasant short holiday in Belgium with Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Brown, when Hugh had the pleasure of sending his father a letter from the "Centre of Field of Waterloo". He returned, feeling better for the change, to his work on *Cranford* and *Beau Brocade*. The former had to be completed first, and this left the other so late that it was decided to give the artist longer time by postponing publication for a year. Early in November the *Cranford* was published, and the artist's fears as to whether he was keeping up to the *Vicar* level were soon allayed, for

the book was welcomed by the public with even more enthusiasm, and Mrs. Gaskell's dainty story was given a new life. The first indication of success came in a message of congratulation from Austin

Dobson, as we learn from a note Hugh wrote to him at Christmas:

I did not think that the *Saturday Review* was by you, but please do not think that, because it is severe in parts, it hurts my "feelins". Whoever wrote it was very kind and told the truth, giving me praise where he could, and I felt that though he fastened on the baddest ones, it was for the purpose of spurring me so that I shouldn't "do it again". I honestly confess that I don't think *Cranford* nearly such good work as the *Vicar* to be praised, for it was certainly not what I had expected in my most sanguine moments before its publication.



"PREACHED BEFORE SOME JUDGE"  
From "*Cranford*" (Macmillan & Co. Ltd.)

So you will see what unexpected delight has been showered on me by the praise I have got. The letter you sent me first of all was the first and chiefest pleasure I had, it was more than I had conceived possible. I wrote you how happy it made me.

From Comyns Carr the publication of *Cranford* brought a delightful letter, in the course of which he said: "I am up to the eyes in rehearsal—but I must tell you how delighted I am with *Cranford*. It realises all my best hopes of you and

makes me again feel proud to have stood godfather at your christening—ah! it seems a long time since that first day you called upon me and my heart leapt at the sight of a new talent—but it is always a very bright remembrance for me. My great regret is that I do not see you often now. Life is spent in not seeing one's friends—and we are both so busy that we have few chances of meeting.”

It was just after the publication of *Cranford* that Austin Dobson arranged a meeting between Hugh Thomson and Bernard Partridge. Writing of it to his father, Hugh described Partridge as “a young artist on *Punch* who has made quite a name for himself, and whose charming work is the most charming of any I know. The artist is just as charming as his work. He is also an actor, so that he is quite an admirable Crichton. He will be coming to dine some night soon.” Towards the close of the *Cranford* year much fresh work was offered or was already in hand, but in the matter of a book for the following autumn the artist resolved that nothing should be permitted to interfere with the delayed work on Dobson's poems. At the same time he told that friend of a proposal from America whereby he would be in less constant anxiety about money. Brown had already secured for Hugh the offer of a commission from *Scribner's Magazine*—to be done with the brush and wanted immediately—and at the end of November Scribner's wrote “confirming 7 guineas and 10 guineas each for 22 drawings on *The Social Awakening of London*,<sup>1</sup> being £175 for the set”. Although, owing to the time necessary for engraving, only eighteen drawings were done, the publishers handsomely sent the full amount, but Hugh wrote that the amount overpaid was to be deducted from a second set of drawings that had been commissioned meanwhile. That was for sixteen drawings to accompany an article by Walter Besant on *A Riverside Parish*.<sup>2</sup> In the first

<sup>1</sup> *Scribner's Magazine*, April 1892.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* August 1892.



set Hugh wished to include a sketch of John Burns addressing a meeting, but in reply to an enquiry Burns wrote that he was afraid he could not get up a meeting for the purpose, though he would be glad to see the artist at Lavender Hill, where he could make a sketch and see photographs of big meetings; and that was done. Of the doing of one of the riverside sketches he wrote: "My critics, in the inevitable crowd which gathered round me, informed each other, that I was 'takin' it bleedin' good'. My time was half employed waving spectators aside and telling them that I could not see through them."

Another commission from Scribner's came to a sudden end, and remained uncompleted, because of its painful nature. The incident had best be recounted here by Mrs. Hugh Thomson herself as told in one of her letters:

At the bottom of a huge trunk—of which I must give you the history some time—under the paper lining the bottom, I found three drawings. They were the attempts my poor Hugh had made to do the work for *Scribner's* for the article by Mrs. Hodgson Burnett of Little Lord Fauntleroy fame on the *Crippled Children's Home*, which he had to give up altogether. I told you how nice Scribner's people had been over the whole matter and how they took the blame upon themselves for having pressed him to do it when he had declined originally. The name of the Home is given on the drawings—"St. Monica's Home". One of them is the Lionel room, or corner of a room, which had been endowed, I believe, by Mrs. Hodgson Burnett in memory of her son—the "Little Lord" of her book—and which was reserved for the most serious or sad cases.

Sad cases, indeed—and more than sad, these poor little victims of human ill-doing or of Nature's cruelty, so painful to see and record that Hugh's tender heart was wrung, and he revolted against the completion of the undertaking. We know the drawings, and we can testify that not even the sympathy and talent of the artist could reconcile him to the truth of his observation.

On the triumphant success of *Cranford*, by which he was immensely cheered, Macmillans wished to have *Our Village*





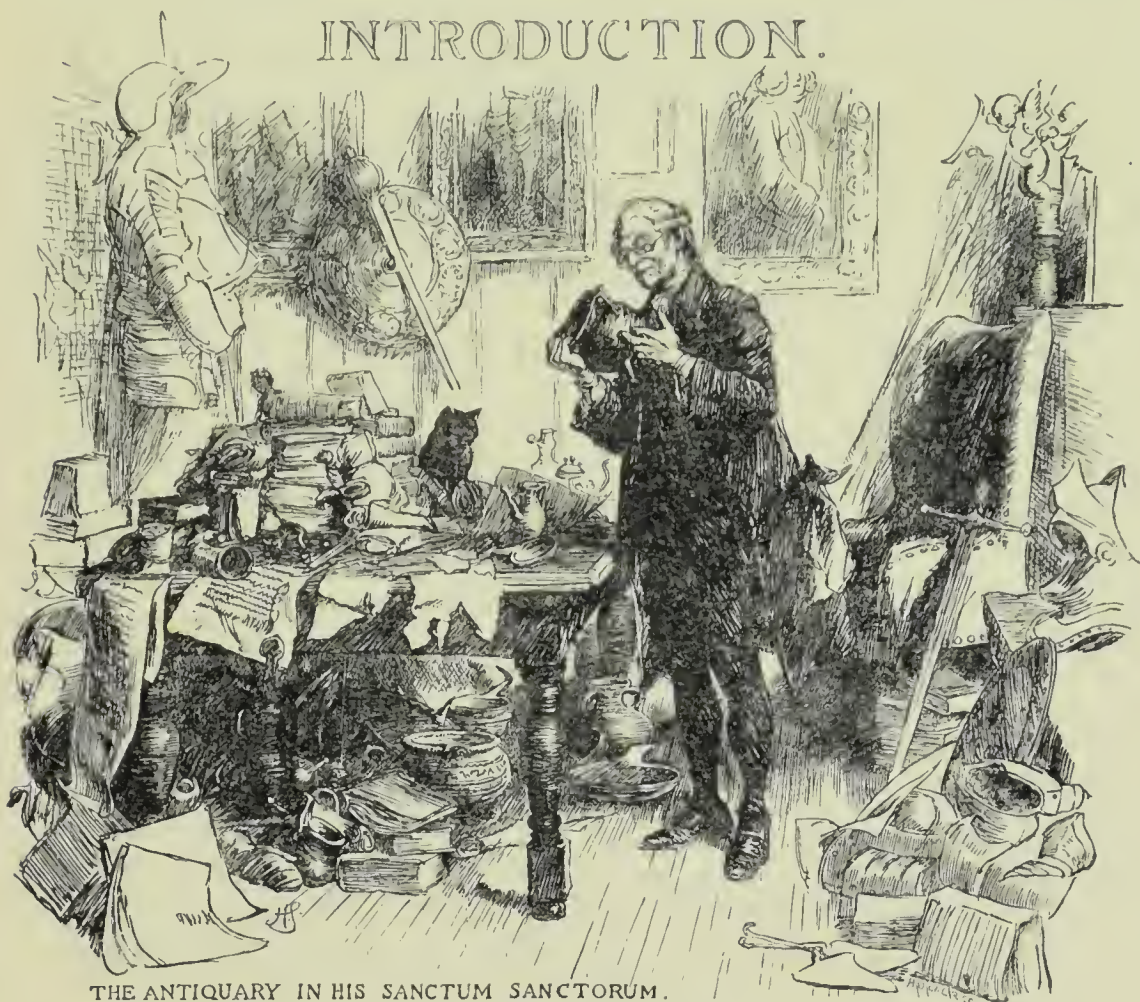
MR. CARGILL ACCOSTING LORD ETHERINGTON

*From "St. Ronan's Well", by Sir Walter Scott, published by  
Adam & Charles Black, 1894*



done for the next season, but Hugh insisted that *Beau Brocade* held the field, and so Miss Mitford's book was decided upon for a year later still. Then Mr. George Allen had "asked for a book", and been promised one, while there was a com-

## INTRODUCTION.



THE ANTIQUARY IN HIS SANCTUM SANCTORUM.

Headpiece to "*The Antiquary*", by Sir Walter Scott (published by Adam & Charles Black, 1891)

Engraved on wood by Hooper (the block shows the sympathetic assistance rendered by the interpreter)

mission in hand to do ten drawings for Scott's *St. Ronan's Well* for Messrs. A. & C. Black. This last work failed to make an appeal to the artist and was done with difficulty. Something of the same feeling had been his a couple of years earlier in doing two or three drawings each to *The Antiquary* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*; he had a hampering sense

that he was not altogether suited for illustrating Scott. Of these drawings the "Antiquary in his Sanctum Sanctorum" and the chapter heading to the latter book are the best.

As Hugh was unable to have a new book ready for Macmillans for the autumn season, they decided on a reissue of the *Days with Sir Roger de Coverley* uniform with the *Vicar* and *Cranford*, and asked him to include half a dozen more of the *Spectator* papers with eighteen fresh drawings, but the artist felt that the old and new would not "join" as his method of work had changed so greatly since the earlier drawings were made. Then, too, early in the year there was a proposal that Hugh should illustrate and Dobson edit, seemingly for a limited book-club edition, Walton's *Compleat*<sup>1</sup> *Angler*; but Hugh could not undertake it. "Even if they had offered much money I do not think that it is in my power to do the style of work they suggest except with brush and wash, and then without any sympathy."

In the spring of 1892 the Thomsons decided to go again to Seaford—an excursion to the Suffolk coast having failed to reveal scenic "bits" suitable to Hugh's work. There he concentrated on the drawings for Austin Dobson's poems, and after a couple of months wrote to the poet (July 4, 1892): "I have received your very kind and forbearing note and feel so compunctious that I should make you so anxious. Since I came here I have not been engaged on anything else and the length of time occupied arises out of a seizure I sometimes have in which all ability to draw seems to leave me, so that nothing seems to come right. Nothing does seem to come right so far as distinction and charm are concerned, and one must try in these drawings for some faint breath of these qualities. Because I so felt my weakness, the first poem which I attacked

<sup>1</sup> This fashion of spelling the title of the first edition of the work is absurd, as far as Izaak Walton and his printer are concerned. It is true that the engraved portion of the title-page gives the word "compleat"—but that was the fancy of the copper-plate engraver. The printer, at the beginning of the book and in the running "title" on the top of every other page throughout the volume, gives it as "complete"—and that was Walton's way of spelling it.



was *Beau Brocade*, and I am now engaged on *A Gentleman of the Old School*. If you only realised what the music of these lines and those of *The Gentleman* and *A Dead Letter* makes



A WINDY DAY ON SEAFORD SHORE. 1892

*From a Water-colour Drawing. Lent by Mrs. Hugh Thomson*

me feel you would understand the despairing sense of inability to suggest them.”

In August Hugh writes from Seaford to his father with glee that they are now in the house they have taken there—their furniture is down from Putney, and they are at home again, having decided to remain for years instead of months. He named the house “Ardh-ae-Bhinn”, or “beautiful height”, but employed the modern spelling Ardeevin “out of consideration for the Saxon”. At Seaford he found himself within



walking distance of delightful villages, and from the heights of the Downs of extensive views, and in his letters to his father are many country enthusiasms—a gorgeous sunset from Firle Beacon, great thunderstorms over the Channel, walks, when “Mick” starts a hare, and so on, and the delights of golf on the Seaford course. He was ever at his happiest when leading a simple country life, and the years at Seaford within easy access of all in which his country-bred nature delighted formed a happy and fruitful period.

When the proofs of his drawings for the *Beau Brocade* volume began to reach him Hugh was distressed at the way in which some of the blocks were turning out, “as all I strive for in the drawing is gone. If I were technically stronger, and a fine draughtsman I might afford to lose the other quality which I strive for, but the drawings become very commonplace.” In a fuller letter he compares the effect of the new blocks with those in *Cranford*:

... the drawings were kept as light in tone as possible, all colour being concentrated about the hats or hair, or interior of the coach, so that the drawing and type might blend. I am afraid all the proofs are heavy and would *print* much heavier. I will not contrast the coach drawing here with one in *Cranford* (printed—not a proof which is always clearer than the print can be). I admit that the coach is the least successful of the four, but it answers my purpose better as being similar in line work to the drawing in *Cranford*, which is at page 57, “A visit to an Old Bachelor”. Compare the silvery effect of this with “Straining and Creaking”. Your eye can see at once the difference between the line work on the sides of the coaches, not to speak of the shading on the off-horses, which has become as black and full of colour as the man’s hat or the interior of the coach. The silvery effect is only kept by keeping every part transparent which should be transparent. . . . And now that I have peppered them I must pepper myself. But indeed *Cranford* was splendidly reproduced.

The desire to excel even his very best in the illustrating of Austin Dobson’s poems made the artist more than usually self-critical over the work and behind-hand in finishing it. It was when nearing the completion of this that in writing to his father he said: “The great drawback with me is that

with each job I grow more particular. What satisfied me with the last does not satisfy me with this and so on, and I fidget and grow hot and cold and vexed unless the work is thoroughly up to my satisfaction. Of course this is the best way; better so than to rest content and to think that one can do no better. It is also, in the long run, good business, because the work



DOLLY THE CHAMBERMAID "SADDLING THE GRAY MARE"  
TO RIDE OFF AND CHALLENGE THE HIGHWAYMAN

*Published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892*

is never scamped, and people are quick to find out slovenly work. It also improves one, because every effort is bound to make the next if not easier yet a further improvement. All summer I have been struggling to keep my engagements and this has a worrying effect on the artistic temperament. And this reminds me to tell you that my hair has been falling out very much during this last half year, so that I am growing quite bald, more especially over the temples."

Although he had not in the least realised the fact, "a Hugh

Thomson book" had come to be an important feature of the autumn publishing season—nay, more, in the art world too—and he was soon to learn, with deep satisfaction, that all



JOTTED HER DOWN ON THE SPOT  
(Hogarth sketching the heroic chambermaid)  
From "*The Ballad of Beau Brocade*"

the large-paper edition of *The Ballad of Beau Brocade* had been sold before publication, and that the reissue of the *Sir Roger* volume had been equally successful. The publishers of the former volume were immediately ready to arrange with the artist for a companion to it, and Hugh felt distressed at having to suggest improved terms: "They have written such extremely nice letters that I hate the idea of bargaining with them at all, but I must. One cannot have the money slipped generously into one's pocket without any trouble to one's self." And then he writes to Austin Dobson (December 1, 1892): "I enclose a letter which I have received from Messrs. Kegan Paul, the contents of which have

given me great satisfaction. It is a very nice letter, the only sting to my self-consciousness lying in the phrase about 'driving bargains' which makes my ears burn. . . . I hope, dear Mr. Dobson, that you don't think I have been too grasping. . . . Messrs. K. P. have been so nice and agreeable that I have been ashamed to try my bold buccaneering business measures first



on them." This new book was to be prepared for the season two years ahead, for Hugh was already committed to *Our*



THE OLD SEDAN CHAIR

"As he lifts her out light"

From "*The Ballad of Beau Brocade*" (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.)

*Village* for Macmillans for the next season, and to a book for George Allen, which, with occasional or pot-boiling work, meant that he began the new year with every prospect of

its being a busy one. The occasional work included an introduction to a fresh field, the first glimpse of which was had in August 1892, when Hugh must have been entertained as well as complimented by receiving a long blarneying rhodomontade of a letter from Joseph Grego.<sup>1</sup> The gist of this was to ask if the artist would do three or four full-page coloured drawings of old-fashioned Christmas subjects for the follow-



TAILPIECE TO "COUNTRY PICTURES"

From "*Our Village*", by Mary R. Mitford, published by Macmillan & Co., 1893

ing year's issue of *Pears' Christmas Annual*—and name his own price, "each drawing to be settled for when sent in". The drawings were done, and duly appeared in *Pears' Christmas Annual* for 1894.

The year 1893 began with an exhibition at the Fine Arts Society's Gallery of the originals of the illustrations to the

<sup>1</sup> Humorous artist and writer on art, especially on our early comic artists and caricaturists—a collector—boon companion, greatly liked (1843-1908). He was, among other things, editor of *Pears' Pictorial* and *Christmas Annual*, for which he sought Hugh Thomson's contributions.



STARING AT A BALLOON IN THE HARD SUMMER

*From "Our Village"*

*Beau Brocade* volume, and the artist was at once busy on his book for the Christmas season, which was to be completed earlier than hitherto. "Did I tell you", he wrote to his father



on January 20, "that I am engaged on a new book for Macmillans? This book is *Our Village*, by Miss Mitford, a woman who wrote about 1820. There are sketches of various characters about the village, and sketches of the country round. The first primrose, 'violeting', and so forth. They are very pleasant sketches, and if I had more time I should have liked to make a study of the various wild flowers to decorate the book withal, but it must be done by July, which means the production of four drawings a week at the least, and if one takes pains with them this is sometimes difficult."

Twice during this year came proposals for Hugh to undertake books for new publishers. In the one case an American publisher wished him to illustrate *The Reveries of a Bachelor*, one of the most daintily sentimental pieces of literature that America has given us, but Hugh not wishing to undertake it, named terms, 600 guineas for fifty drawings and the originals to remain his property, which he hoped would prove prohibitive. The reason he gave for his "bold buccaneering" style was that he was thinking of taking royalties on future book-work. The second invitation was from Mr. Heinemann, who (through Austin Dobson) offered £250 for fifty drawings for *Mansie Wauch*; but Moir's story of the Scottish tailor does not appear to have appealed to the artist as suitable.

In August 1893 Hugh had the delight of welcoming his father to Seaford, at which time he was engaged on an unaccustomed excursion into "commercial art", making a couple of drawings for an insurance company's calendars;<sup>1</sup> and after his departure was busy on the work for *Pears'*. "I am just now engaged on a large drawing of an Inn Yard, with all the bustle attendant on the arrival and departure of the coaches. For the purpose of getting a picturesque old galleried innyard Mr. Dobson wrote to a friend of his, Mr. Ashby Sterry,<sup>2</sup> who has a wide acquaintance with old London, for information as to any of the old galleried inns yet existing.

<sup>1</sup> For the Scottish Provident Institution.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ashby Sterry, the author of *Lays of a Lazy Minstrel*, etc., who died in 1917.



"Give ear, give ear! O rats, appear!  
And follow, follow me!"

*From "The Piper of Hamelin", published by William Heinemann, 1893*

He wrote that the Old Bell in Holborn was about the most perfect specimen extant, so on Wednesday I went up to town with my sketching bag in order to make a coloured drawing of it. If you will turn to your copy of *Coaching Days and Coaching Ways*, p. 224, you will see a drawing of a galleried inn entitled The Old Tabard, Southwark. This old inn has now been pulled down, but the Old Bell is of much the same character, though not quite so fine perhaps, but it answered admirably for my purpose, giving the necessary colour and form. . . . I have a great number of figures to put in, persons hurrying along the galleries, people getting up and down the coaches; trunks lying about, and as much as possible all the bustle that would be likely in such a scene. I shall be glad when I am laying on the colour."

In the autumn of this year, too, he made a dozen illustrations and a title-page for *The Piper of Hamelin*, a children's Christmas "fantastic opera," by Robert Buchanan (giving it a happy ending), which was produced at the Comedy Theatre, and published simultaneously in book form.<sup>1</sup> The drawings, done somewhat hurriedly—though none would imagine it—are marked by dainty fancy and humour; but the artist, strangely enough, never liked to look back on this book, feeling thoroughly dissatisfied with it—"a hurried scamped piece of work both in printing and drawing", Hugh described it in a letter to his friend Vinycomb. This may be taken as an example of his frequent tendency to misjudge his work and belittle it—even, as in this instance, to be blind to its undoubted excellence.

Early in November *Our Village* was published. "I think it will look very nice indeed", wrote Mr. Frederick Macmillan to Hugh when the book was printing; and when it came out it had deservedly a reception not less cordial than its predecessors.

<sup>1</sup> The fact that it was produced on the 20th of December, with music by F. H. Allwood, is not recorded in the book. The issue for sale in the theatre was marked "Price Eighteenpence"; the second was issued by W. Heinemann with a new title-page.



## CHAPTER IV

THE JANE AUSTEN NOVELS, ETC.

1894-1899



THE year 1894 was to open sadly for Hugh Thomson. He had arranged to spend four or five days after Christmas with his father at Kilrea. "I scarcely know", he wrote, "what I am to do about keeping time with my work. It will land me in a nice hobble in about half a year's time, when all are asking me—have you got *my* book finished yet? I have three to do, and my work is cut out for me." Hugh had been ill in December shortly after writing that letter, wherefore Austin Dobson sent him a message of sympathy and cheery encouragement, as usual: "I rejoice to think how much your widening reputation is justifying the predictions of some of your friends, who were wiser in their generation than the sporting prophets. Honestly I never heard you so much praised as now. More power to your elbow, say I; and may every hair on your head be a mould candle to light you into the innermost Paradise of Art. (*N.B.* This last is adapted from an Irish authority.)" Before the end of the year Hugh had been called again to Kilrea owing to his father's illness, but the few days he had planned to spend there grew into six weeks—for there his father died in January. Then Hugh had a bad attack of influenza, so bad that, as he put it, he was only able to crawl home after that interval, and for several weeks more he was ill at Seaford. The death of John Thomson had been a sad blow to Hugh, for, as we have seen, an

The Initial letter is from *Tom Brown's School Days*, by Thomas Hughes, published by Ginn & Co., 1918.

unusually strong bond of affection existed between the two: indeed, each fresh success that Hugh achieved was the more welcome because of the delight which he knew it would afford at Kilrea.

Mention has already been made of the artist having undertaken to illustrate a book for Mr. George Allen, "Ruskin's publisher" as he was usually termed. This book was Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the first work which he arranged on a royalty basis. "This book I am to get £500 for, and a royalty of 7d. a copy on every copy sold after 10,000." Owing to some misapprehension on Hugh's part this work had been undertaken after it had been considered between him and Messrs. Macmillan, and he had doubted its suitability for illustration. His old firm wrote expressing extreme regret at this, and Hugh—to use a word he often employed—was very "compunctious" about it. Messrs. Macmillan offered him a commission to do fifty illustrations for each of the other five of Jane Austen's stories. This work was undertaken, the agreement also embodying a royalty to the artist on all copies of each of the novels sold beyond the first 10,000, as in the case of the volume for Mr. Allen. Hugh's innate distaste for discussing the money aspect of his work was so great that it was only through the agency of a friend that it was possible to arrange the business on this new footing. When Mr. Allen wished him to undertake another book, on terms even better than those for the *Pride and Prejudice*, Hugh declined for the Macmillans' sake, as he did several other offers for the same reason. He could not permit self-interest to override his abiding sense of gratitude to the firm through which he had been afforded the most favourable opportunity possible both for developing his talent and for making his work widely known, and it is pleasant to record that the somewhat untoward episode in no way marred the friendly relations that continued between him and his publishers up to the end of his life.

Of the first meeting of Hugh Thomson and George Allen,



MENU AND PROGRAMME OF THE BOOKSELLERS' DINNER, APRIL 14, 1894

Drawn by Hugh Thomson; etched by G. W. Rhead, R.P.E.

Professionally introducing the portraits of Jacob Tonson (1656-1736), who published the first octavo edition of Shakespeare's Plays in 1709, and Edward Cave (1691-1754), the famous printer and publisher of the *Gentleman's Magazine*.



at a small party in Bedford Square, George Allen's daughter, Miss Grace Allen, records: "Here were two of the shyest and most modest of men, each inclined to shirk the interview and dreading it because he had heard so much of the other's fame!" The two grew to be fast friends, and Hugh Thomson and his wife became welcome guests at the publisher's home at Orpington. Miss Allen recalls a pleasing incident from one of their visits. She tells of it "with some reserve", she writes, "yet with pride that he should have shown his heart to us. We had persuaded Hugh Thomson to sing an Irish love-song. . . . During its rendering, he slipped his arm round his wife's waist with charming Irish frankness of manner—half addressing her as though she were sole auditor."

The lively cordiality between the families so quickly sprang up that a few weeks later we find Hugh—seemingly rather elated on receiving a cheque due from the publisher—referring brightly to the transaction in a note to Miss Allen: "I hope all you young ladies are well and in brilliant health, also the Grand Old Boy, whose wonderful caligraphy on stamped paper I so much admire and all too readily part with. (The best respects to Mrs. Allen and him, and homage of the deepest to you and your sisters.)"

Work on *Pride and Prejudice* began in the autumn of 1893, together probably with that on the new Austin Dobson volume, *The Story of Rosina and Other Poems*; but the winter and early spring caused a serious set-back. Writing to Austin Dobson (April 3, 1894), Hugh put the matter before him:

I have received a letter from Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co. asking me about the drawings for the Poems, and have acknowledged it. I have not written to you concerning the work because I had hoped to run up to town in order to see and explain to you why none had been forwarded. I have had hard luck through the winter. When in Ireland at the end of the year, where I had gone to see my father before he died, I was attacked by the influenza very badly and have never thoroughly got well. After six weeks of it in Ireland I crawled home and had two relapses here so that practically all winter I have not been able to work. I have no spring, nor inspiration in any subject such as would give it, at any rate, interest in my eyes. I have been at work, and have to keep

at it, with no agreeable result. The dregs of the fever are still in me and make me easily tired. I need not say how sorry I am, and, of course, I don't know what you and the firm would like me to do. If I rush them through they will be awful, and I question if I have the ability to rush.



*Offended two or three young ladies"*

(At his own ball Mr. Bingley offended two or three young ladies by not asking them to dance, through being wholly engrossed with another)

*From "Pride and Prejudice", by Jane Austen, published by George Allen, 1894*

To make a thing even decent requires the utmost plodding on my part. You know well that there is no brilliant dash about me such as would enable me to emulate Partridge's performance in your last volume.<sup>1</sup> And I grow slower and slower and more pernicketty every year. Would it be possible to postpone the publication for another year? I could then jog along and hand the drawings in in the course of the autumn, and

<sup>1</sup> *Proverbs in Porcelain*, 1893; reference is made to it a few pages further on.

the work would have a chance of delicacy at any rate. I have written to Messrs. Paul to this effect, and remembering a remark you made to the effect that it was as well that there should not be a continuous year by year publication of the illustrated Poems am encouraged to think that this might suit you and them.

In another month or so, after taking things easily, he was able to write more cheerfully. The work on the *Rosina* volume had, it would appear, been postponed, and Hugh was able to concentrate more particularly on *Pride and Prejudice*, the drawings for which must be referred to in the following passage (May 9, 1894):

Any drawings I have done this Spring have been rather hurried. Luckily I had a good many executed before Christmas. There are close on 40 through. Just now I am in capital form having only been working about four hours each day for the last few weeks and playing golf as much as possible. A clearer head and a less worried mind seem to have come to me after my physicking, so much so that I actually won a medal a week ago. However, these triumphs must be laid aside, and after Whitsuntide I must no longer call myself a convalescent.

Every new work that Hugh Thomson undertook for a fresh publisher meant the making of new friends. Business relations came to be but incidental, as it were, in a new and intimate friendship. It was markedly so in the case of this volume, the first of the Jane Austen books, as we have seen. From the beginning he and George Allen and family were on the friendliest footing, and Thomson a super-welcome visitor to their home at Orpington.

The work on Jane Austen's novel was completed—160 drawings—and the book published, with an introduction by Professor George Saintsbury, in October 1894. Once more was the artist suffering from the feeling that he had not succeeded: "I saw in the column 'books received'", he wrote, "that Allen has sent forth *Pride and Prejudice*. . . . I have given up hope of Artistic Successes now, but feel that at my time of life (thirty-four!) I may count myself lucky if one can do



good business. In the ardent hope that the golden shekels may roll in I have found refuge.”<sup>1</sup>

The letter closing on that doleful note was addressed to Austin Dobson, who replied: “In *Pride and Prejudice* you have rung the bell loudly, and completely vanquished the monster Process. As to H——,<sup>2</sup> please give him the very least you can. You cannot think what a thorn in the flesh his inopportune, unsolicited, flatulent flatteries are to me. And he is only an autograph hunter after all. I don’t know what you mean by the Jeremiad at the end of your letter, with its announcement that, despairing of Art, you are going to take up with that ‘fine old-gentlemanly vice’ of Avarice. You are at your best, the critics are shouting themselves hoarse in your praise; and you require no prefatory remarks from any pretender whatsoever. Indeed, I have felt painfully during the past few weeks like a blind fiddler who has been unfortunate enough to take up his post in front of the drums and the roar of the circus.”

Dobson’s closing reference is to the fact that he had written an Introduction to a volume that Macmillans had just issued as a stop-gap. This was *Coridon’s Song and Other Verses from Various Sources*, with illustrations by Hugh Thomson, in which the various old songs and ballads that Hugh had illustrated in the *E.I.M.* were brought together in a volume uniform with *Cranford* and its companions. The republication seems unjustifiably to have distressed the artist, for although the drawings were considerably reduced from their magazine size, they suffered little in the process, and the volume has in it very much of beauty and humour in the illustrations. It is probable that he rather grieved to recall his earlier Abbey manner, in view of his subsequent liberation and entire assertion of his uninfluenced artistic self.

<sup>1</sup> Public appreciation of the *Pride and Prejudice* is shown by the fact that in twelve months, 11,605 copies had been sold (apart from 3500 sent to America), and by 1907 no fewer than 25,000 copies of this edition.

<sup>2</sup> A gentleman who periodically appealed to Hugh Thomson for autographs and had begged for a scrap of Austin Dobson’s handwriting.

In any case, Hugh's attitude towards it is indicated in a note to Austin Dobson, saying that he is going to the Print Room



“No Amaryllis chants alternate lays . . .  
Nor with his reed the jocund valleys ring.”

*From “A Journey to Exeter”, in “Coridon’s Song”, published by  
Macmillan & Co., 1894*

of the British Museum for the purpose of collecting some details of costume, etc., of the time of François Boucher, for *The Story of Rosina*: “Thank you very much for the kindly

references you make to the work in the volume [*Coridon*] which Macmillans have brought out. The sight of the work, however, depresses me, and I would not have regretted its permanent burial in the old volumes of *The English Illustrated*. Thank goodness there can be no more resurrection business, there being nothing left to exhume."

In memory of their old association on the *E.I.M.* Hugh sent



An amusing coincidence. A very early sketch by Kate Greenaway, illustrating her ambition to be a humorous artist. It represents a love-lorn swain piping to his ridiculous adored one. It passed into Mr. W. Marcus Ward's possession.

*From "Kate Greenaway", by M. H. Spielmann and George S. Layard  
(A. & C. Black, 1905)*

a copy of the *Pride and Prejudice* to Comyns Carr, who wrote in cordial appreciation: "I was very proud to find my name so gracefully inscribed in the first leaf of your beautiful book. Do you know I am inclined to think it is quite the best thing you have done: in delicate definition of character, and in felicity of actual workmanship, it is certainly in advance of all that has preceded. We see but little of one another now yet you may be assured that I take the same warm interest in



your career I always did and it pleases me more than I can say that the memory of any little service I may have rendered you still lingers in your mind."

An interesting note from Dr. (afterwards Sir) Lauder Brunton reached Hugh early in 1895. It was an expression of



SIR DILBERRY DIDDLE

"And prudently cautious, in Venus's lap,  
Beneath her short apron, Mars takes a long nap."

*From "Coridon's Song" (Macmillan & Co., 1894)*

thanks for a drawing, "a lovely present" which the artist had sent to the physician as a Christmas gift, and in it Lauder Brunton emphasised an aspect of Hugh's work on which he had earlier commented; that is to say, his gift of imparting expression even to small figures: "I have been studying the beautiful drawing you have sent me with a magnifying glass and it is still more wonderful when seen through this glass

than when looked at with the naked eye. The accuracy of touch reminds me of Gerard Dow, and perhaps still more of Albert Dürer. The extraordinary power of giving expression to the faces is to me most astonishing. It would be



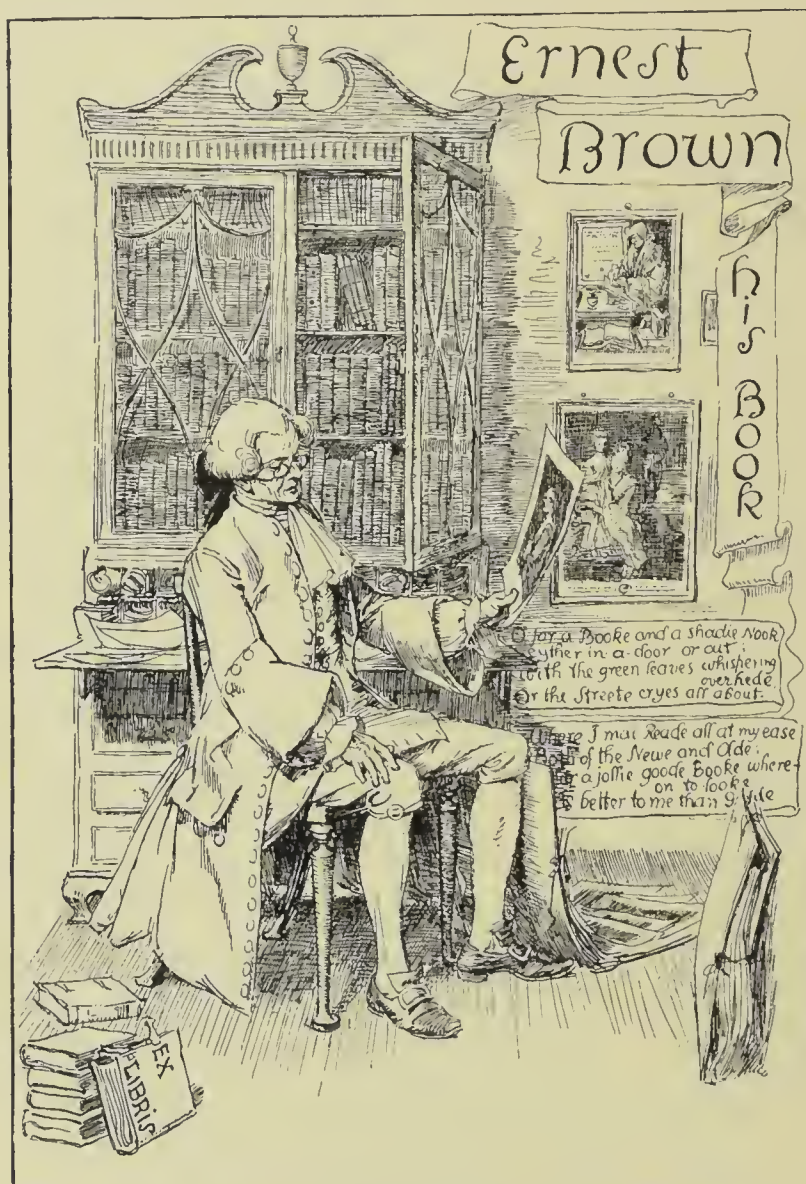
Book-plate for his son, John Thomson, a humorous emblazonment of the motto as borrowed from Virgil

a great boon to many people, painters and others, if you were to publish a work on expression with illustrations. I have an idea that Leonardo da Vinci began such a work, but did not finish it or else did not publish it."

Hugh Thomson was far too modest a man to think himself



capable of acting on such a hint, though his letters show him gifted with a clarity of expression, and a command of words

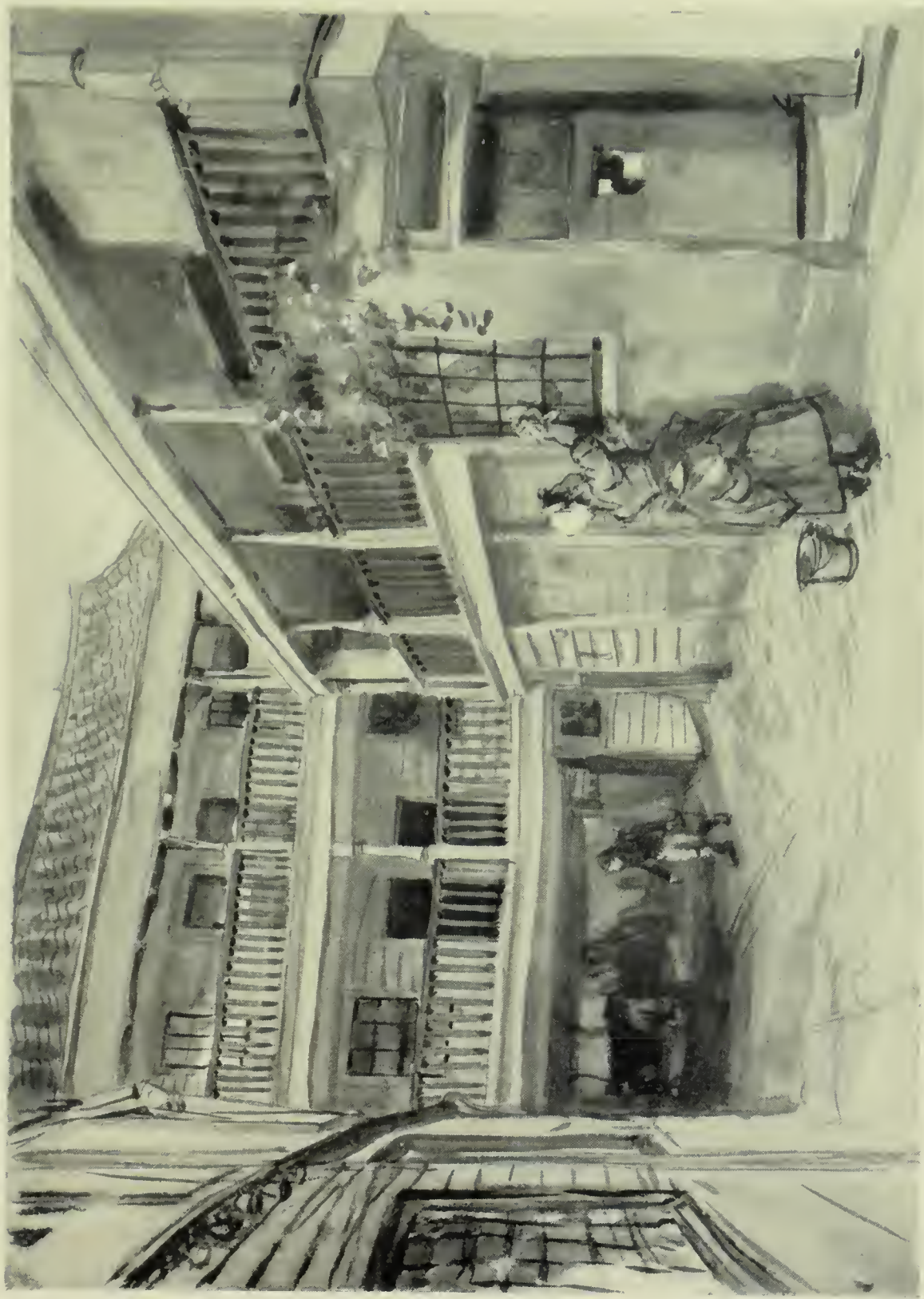


Mr. Ernest Brown's book-plate—with Albert Dürer's engraving of Erasmus and a picture by Gainsborough on the wall; and with the verse quoted by Lord Avebury (in his *Pleasures of Life*, 1887-90) as a genuine old English song, but proved by Austin Dobson (in *A Bookman's Budget*) to have been composed by John Wilson, the second-hand bookseller, as a motto for his catalogue.

Lent by Mr. Oliver Brown

that suggest he was thoroughly capable of doubling the parts of author and artist. On the very day on which he received





From a colour-sketch of an old inn coach-yard, details of which were used by the artist in the water-colour  
"Departure from La Belle Sauvage Inn Yard", reproduced in this volume





Lauder Brunton's letter he was writing to reproach John Vinycomb for his modesty while thanking him for a book of his book-plate designs:<sup>1</sup> "Of one thing I am certain, you have been too modest all your life. Nowhere and at no time has heraldry been treated with such dignity and style as you impart to it. . . . There is nothing small or niggling in your



*Photo: George Dallas, Garvagh, Co. Derry*

HUGH THOMSON SKETCHING AT KILREA

(at the Lake-side in the Manor House grounds belonging to Dr. Lennox. 1894)

treatment of a grand theme. How footy look all the modern little-figure-story kinds of plates, the kind of thing, which, alas, I have perpetrated two or three times."<sup>2</sup> A little later, in writing to Austin Dobson about the drawings for *The Story*

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Vinycomb issued at least three volumes of his remarkable book-plates, one of the books being a treatise on the art of designing "Ex Libris" (published by A. & C. Black).

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Thomson designed book-plates for Ernest Brown, Canon Alfred Ainger, the latter through the intermediary of Austin Dobson, for Mrs. Carmichael Thomas, J. Comyns Carr, Mr. William E. F. Macmillan, and for a few others.



of *Rosina*, he said: "I have been doing nothing else (with the exception of a bookplate done at a friend's request, the price offered, £15 : 15s. tempted me)".

Over those *Rosina* drawings also he had his fits of depression, for in the same letter to the author he wrote: "The last two months have been a kind of misery owing to the loss of ability to draw satisfactorily. I began by trying to come as near to the Partridge<sup>1</sup> book as possible, knowing that to be your ideal work, and got into a queer state of mind over the effort, the old fable of 'the frog and the ox'. It is only since the new year that I have felt myself emerging from this, and able to come to some decision to try and be content with what is in my power to do."

He now had evidence of the growing demand for his work, and the appreciation of it, in America, in an enquiry from the *Cosmopolitan* if he was free to undertake work for it, and from *Scribner's* asking if he would permit a sketch of himself and his work to appear in *The Bookbuyer*, and could name a personal friend who would write such an article; and there came a letter from an enthusiast, who said he had been collecting "all books with your illustrations in" since the publication of *Sir Roger*. Home appreciation was shown in a droll, if characteristically forced, letter from Joseph Grego, "in merry pin", expressing gratitude for "your thoughtful, I may say providential solicitude in tempering the miseries of seasonable ailments by your genial sunshiny humour! . . . I am writing your publisher a testimonial that no sufferer or invalid should neglect a course of Hugh Thomson's marvellous tonic—the restorative effects on impaired vitality, etc., found in your illustrations to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and no household should be without a case—I mean a bookcase full. You have revived the gently humorous Jane, and given her a new lease of life . . . and I have derived much benefit from your letters." Grego goes

<sup>1</sup> *Proverbs in Porcelain*, by Austin Dobson, so charmingly illustrated by Bernard Partridge in 1893 (Kegan Paul).

on to say that Hugh's water-colours on the real old-fashioned English Christmas are greatly appreciated and will he please do half a dozen sketches in black and white on the same themes for the same Christmas number of *Pears' Annual*.



"I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW, MA'AM, THAT MR. FERRARS IS MARRIED"

(—The remark which gave Miss Marianne hysterics, out of sympathy with her sister, Elinor Dashwood)

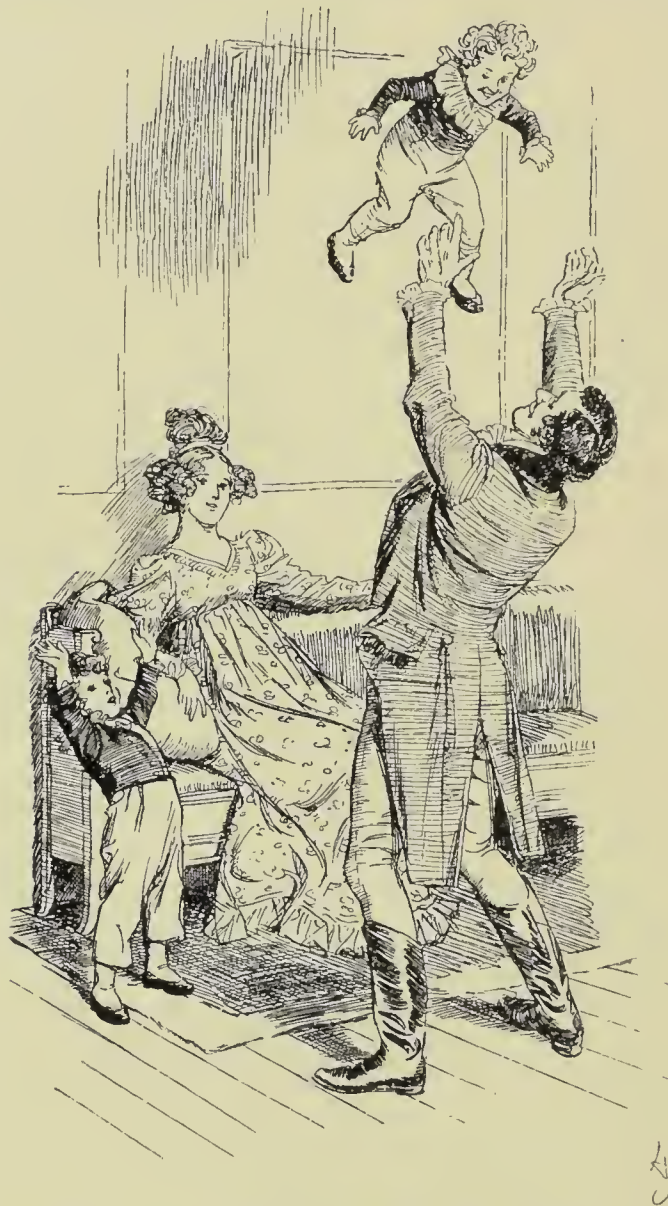
From "*Sense and Sensibility*", by Jane Austen (Macmillan & Co., 1896)

(Slightly reduced)

In the early summer of 1895, while finishing the drawings for *Rosina*, Hugh Thomson contributed a sketch of an angler of a hearty John Bull type, set in one of Hugh's Izaak Walton sort of landscapes, to the first of the daily issues of *The Octopus*, an Eights-Week publication at Oxford, which included also characteristic work by the youthful

Max Beerbohm. Shortly after the last of the *Rosina* drawings had been sent off, Hugh had another spell of illness.

On recovery he set to work on *Sense and Sensibility*,



"AND THEN THEIR UNCLE COMES IN, AND TOSSES THEM UP TO THE CEILING  
IN A VERY FRIGHTFUL WAY. . . . BUT THEY LIKE IT, PAPA"

From "*Emma*", by Jane Austen, published by Macmillan & Co., 1896  
(Slightly reduced)

the first of the five of Jane Austen's stories that he had undertaken to illustrate for Macmillans. For about two years the artist may be said to have lived in those social circles so



delicately and humorously set forward by the novelist—and to have depicted them with a delicacy and a humour akin to her own. For a very large number of readers it might be said that, in the words of his friend Grego, Hugh Thomson had “revivified the gently humorous Jane”, for the five volumes in which he accomplished this brilliant feat present together a remarkable example of sustained illustrative skill and varied invention. The successive volumes were published as the “Hugh Thomson books”, two each appearing in the season of 1896, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*, and of 1897 *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*.<sup>1</sup>

When *The Story of Rosina* was published in the autumn of 1895, Hugh could not fail to be gratified by Austin Dobson's prefatory tribute: “Were it not for the recollection of certain inconvenient but salutary epigrams, and more particularly Pope's couplet about the pictures that ‘for the page atone’, I might perhaps be disposed to cheat myself with the belief that the welcome that greeted *The Ballad of Beau Brocade* was not, in the main, attributable to the designs of an artist whose hand is never so happy as when it works in the half-light of a bygone time. But if I cannot lay any such flattering unction to my *amour propre*, I may at least reflect with satisfaction that *The Story of Rosina* is equally fortunate in its illustrator. In spite of many obstacles Mr. Hugh Thomson has again afforded me the invaluable aid of his fertile fancy; and I am therefore fully warranted in hoping that this further volume of reprinted verses may achieve a success equal, if not superior, to that of its predecessor.”

If that hope was not wholly fulfilled, the new work was cordially welcomed. The first edition of the *Beau* had been but 2500 copies, but subsequent printings up to 11,000 were necessary before the issue of a cheaper edition. With that

<sup>1</sup> *Pride and Prejudice*, with Hugh Thomson's illustrations, was, as we have seen, published earlier by another firm; when that novel was issued later by Macmillans to accompany the rest, the illustrating of it was entrusted to Mr. C. E. Brock, one of the younger illustrators of the day, who had been most markedly influenced by Thomson's work.

experience before them the publishers issued a first edition of 9000 copies of the *Rosina*. Six of the original drawings



*The Scene*

AN INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

(The poem begins—"The Scene, a wood. A shepherd tip-toe creeping".)

*From "The Story of Rosina", by Austin Dobson, published by  
Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1895*

(Reproduced by permission of the Oxford University Press)

were sold immediately (through the publishers) to a collector in America, and at about the same time there came a suggestion that another American collector would buy the whole fifty if he could also buy Austin Dobson's MS. to bind up with them!





*Watching the suspended cherries*

"The painter [Boucher], watching the suspended cherries,  
Never had seen such little fingers play. . . .  
Low in his heart a whisper said 'I've found her'."

*From "The Story of Rosina", published by Kegan Paul, Trench,  
Trübner & Co., 1895*

The issue of *Rosina* was followed by a request from another publisher to Hugh Thomson to undertake a Christmas book for him, but as the artist was already engaged with work



for two years ahead, nothing came of it. At about the same time came a letter suggesting that Hugh should undertake Washington Irving's *Old Christmas*, but this he probably refused to consider on the ground that Randolph Caldecott's edition held the field. Towards the end of November, in noting that he had sent the publishers a batch of *Sense and Sensibility* drawings, he says: "I am now going steadily on with it, but goodness only knows what quagmires are in the way between this and the finish. I wish I had had training and could use the model." Among the many letters he received came one from the very popular American author, Kate Douglas Wiggin, and at about the same time, two copies of her books, inscribed: "To Hugh Thomson whose work I admire beyond all words, I send these little books—hoping that some day or other his pictures and my stories may come together".

While at work on the Jane Austen series the artist, apart from his contributions to the Christmas numbers—the *Graphic* and *Pears' Annual*—undertook but one other commission—the illustrating of the eighteenth-century poem *The Chace*, as put forth by William Somervile in 1735. It might have been thought that he would have welcomed the opportunity it afforded him of getting back for a time to his galloping horses and running dogs, though the somewhat turgid blank verse of the Warwickshire squire was not well suited for his pictorial accompaniment, and could scarcely be inspiring. For each of the four books into which the poem is divided he provided an illustrative initial, a full-page drawing, and a tailpiece, but the heading to the poem and the tailpieces were alike printed as full pages, and certain of the tailpieces placed before the end was reached. This may well and justifiably have hurt his sense of bibliographical fitness.

In November 1895 Grego had told Thomson that there had been enquiries made as to the possibility of securing him as member of either the Royal Society, or the Royal Institute, of Painters in Water-Colours, but there for some months the matter rested—Hugh probably taking no notice



FRENCH CAVALRY IN THE CHAMPS ÉLYSÉES

Drawn by the Artist after a visit to Paris in 1895







of the suggestion. In the following May, in the course of one of his long amusingly individual screeds, Grego wrote:

Now *this* is a letter wrung out of my anguish—but needs must when the J——D——L.<sup>1</sup> drives. First I go to the R.W.S. private view (“Will I go to lunch?”—but I don’t) and they say—what I have already reported to you—*per* the Secretary (who has reproduced your two capital pictures for us) Samuel Hodson—“You must get Hugh Thomson into *Our Society!*” Scoff not!—this time it’s very serious—for Blackmore, Secretary of the R.I., to whom I was praising the water-colours we are reproducing for the Xmas Annual ’96—said “Hugh Thomson ought to become a member”—and I think it would be a good thing for the R.I. if you did. The latest outcome is a letter before me from the president asking me to ask you to be put up—or rather to be elected! at once. Sir James Linton writes, “I should *personally* like to see Hugh Thomson a member of the R.I. Would you ascertain whether he would care to join? and if he is favourable to the idea I would send him particulars, we shall have an election soon, about the end of the month, so should like to know next week.” So I am doing the “approaching” business willingly, because I feel—as I was telling Blackmore—you are the very man they ought to get. So you know the whole business, and I hope you will see your way to gratifying the R.I. at once and make every one happy ever after. Please do, and save *me* the mortification of telling J. D. L. I have made a fiasco of my mission—which will be further disappointment all round and crushing to *me*!

It is evident that Hugh did not respond immediately to this cordial invitation. It was on the 4th of January 1897 that he was elected a member of the Royal Institute, being “proposed from the chair on the unanimous recommendation of the Council” (a fellow-member elected at the same time was Phil May). But as it turned out, Hugh Thomson never, to his great regret, found himself able to exhibit there: the whole of his time was so taken up with his black-and-white work, that when the date of “sending-in” arrived he could not get a drawing ready. He was always hoping at no distant date to be a worthy exhibiting member, contributing regularly, but the hope was never realised, and in the end he sorrowfully resigned in 1907. It should be added that no sooner had he consented to being nominated for the R.I. than a definite

<sup>1</sup> (Sir) James D. Linton, at that time President of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colours, who died in 1916.



suggestion was made that he should allow himself to be nominated for the Royal Water-Colour Society, the senior institution, but in deference to the first friendly suggestion he felt bound in courtesy to decline.

Before the election into the Institute took place, and Hugh, as Austin Dobson put it, was "crowned in the market place", the Thomsons had given up their pleasant Seaford house, and returned to London—the removal being decided upon for the sake of their boy's schooling. The new home was set up in a flat at West Kensington (2 Vernon Mansions, Queen's Club Gardens) to be conveniently near to St. Paul's School at which John was entered, and the artist was, it may be believed, less pleased at having to return to London than were his friends. "I hear to my delight that you have moved to London, and are accessible", wrote Austin Dobson. The four years at Seaford had made Hugh an ardent golfer, and on his return to town he joined a suburban golf club where he might get occasional exercise at the game.

The close of the year 1896 saw the publication of two of the Jane Austen volumes, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*.

Then followed the Christmas numbers. He was represented again by double-coloured pages in both the *Graphic* and *Pears' Annual*. The new Austen novels, as we have seen, were hailed with the same general approval as that which had been accorded to the *Pride and Prejudice*, but such pleasure as Hugh had felt in his success at this time was sadly shadowed for him by the death of that cousin, Stewart Hunter, for whom he had ever had a devoted affection, and whose kindly help and encouragement in early years were never forgotten. Hugh went to Ireland for the funeral, and caught there so bad a cold that, on getting home, he was laid up for a time "and in deadly fear of influenza"—with its consequent interruption of that work which had to be done more or less closely to time. The coloured pictures for the Christmas numbers had to be ready early in the year, and there were two further volumes, embodying three stories,

to be completed for the autumn season. And then came an important development in his work as illustrator when he was



MRS. ELTON WAS FIRST SEEN AT CHURCH

(Curiosity in regard to the vulgar bride of a vulgar clergyman)

*From "Emma", by Jane Austen (Macmillan & Co., 1896)*

(Slightly reduced)

commissioned by Messrs. Macmillan to provide a number of illustrations for the first volume of a new series which they were about to inaugurate—with several other volumes of which he was destined to be more fully identified. This was

the *Highways and Byways* series, the first volume of which, dealing brightly with Devon and Cornwall, was being topographically illustrated by Joseph Pennell. The author of it was Arthur Hamilton Norway, C.B., formerly Assistant-Secretary, General Post Office, and the author of a companion volume on Yorkshire, to be mentioned later on. For this Hugh did eight pen-and-ink drawings of figure subjects: landscapes, as such, he did not yet touch. That section of art illustration—landscape for its own sake, and not only as subject background, was soon to follow.

In the summer of 1897 there was a joint exhibition<sup>1</sup> of the work of Hugh Thomson and Linley Sambourne, the ninety drawings of Thomson's that were shown being selected from those done for *Rosina* and for the three volumes of Jane Austen's novels so far published. During this summer, too, came further evidence of the appreciation of his work in America, for Kate Douglas Wiggin wrote suggesting that he should illustrate one of her *Penelope* stories, and her publishers subsequently started negotiations which, however, fell through as the artist was unable to undertake the work. Then from Messrs. Putnams came a suggestion that he should illustrate some of Charles Reade's novels for an American subscription edition; but this proposal also came to nothing so far as Hugh Thomson was concerned.

The artist was also busy completing his Jane Austen series, and in essaying, for his old publishers also, an excursion into what was to him a new field of illustration, though it had, as we learn from a letter from Mr. Frederick Macmillan, long been contemplated. Writing to congratulate him on his election to the Royal Institute, Mr. Macmillan had said: "I am glad to know that you are disposed to go on with the Fairy Picture Books we arranged for with you just four years ago. It will be very appropriate to issue some colour work during the year of your election to the Institute and I feel sure that if the little books come out in good time they will

<sup>1</sup> Held at the gallery of the Fine Art Society.





LEAVING LONDON TO SPEND CHRISTMAS IN THE COUNTRY

“Departure from La Belle Sauvage Inn Yard, London”

*From “Pears’ Annual”, Christmas 1896 (A. & F. Pears, Ltd.)*







prove a great success. My idea is that there should be two; and if you have no feeling against *Jack the Giant Killer* and *The Sleeping Beauty* I would propose that they should be the two. If they do as well as I hope and expect, I should like to issue two fresh stories every Christmas until the public get tired of them. There has been nothing of the kind since Walter Crane and Caldecott some years ago, and there is plenty of room for a fresh 'boom' in illustrated Fairy Stories."

Though some of the drawings for this contemplated series were done during 1897 the work was not completed until the following year, and the last two volumes of the Jane Austen (*Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*) were the "Thomson Books" of the autumn season, while Hugh made his accustomed appearance in the Christmas numbers of the *Graphic* and *Pears'*. From the editor of the latter came an invitation to dine with "the Kernoozers' Club"—a jovial band of connoisseurs of armour, who chose to be known by that name<sup>1</sup>—with the information that Ernest Brown and Walter Payne were to be there ("I have told your friends that you are bound to come so do not make me play ye lyre"), and the intimation that "tired of Xmas fare by that date (December 28) they are indulging in 'Larks'".

Early in 1898 an invitation reached Thomson from Messrs. Thacker & Co. to illustrate for them *Inside the Bar*, in G. J. Whyte-Melville's *Riding Recollections*, and he accepted the commission. Despite the praise of the publishers, Thomson was not satisfied with his Whyte-Melville drawings—perhaps the less so from the fact that they suffered greatly from being printed on the shiny glazed "art" paper which imparts a hard, cold appearance with loss of tone and "quality"—for in the work itself there is an amazing amount of movement and "go" rendered with characteristic spirit.

<sup>1</sup> For the story of that delightful society—a cordial mixture of art, armour, and swordsmanship—the reader is referred to the *Magazine of Art* for 1889. The Kernoozers' Club, founded in 1880 in the studio of Seymour Lucas, R.A., was dissolved by the year 1922. The name arose from the statement of an artist's model: "As to armour I am no Kernoozer, as the French say".

The illustrations to Whyte-Melville were for a limited edition, so that there was no "Thomson book" for the autumn of 1898, Hugh having been engaged in the figure illustrations



A CIRCLE OF ADMIRALS

(Fanny Price's claimed acquaintances)

From "*Mansfield Park*", by Jane Austen, published by Macmillan & Co., 1897

to the North Wales volume of the *Highways and Byways* (for which Pennell was again the artist-topographer). He had paid an extended visit to his native North of Ireland to do *all* the illustrations for the volume *Donegal and Antrim* in the same series. Among the Christmas books he was represented by the delayed *Jack the Giant Killer*, announced as the first of





## KNOCKED OFF HIS HORSE BY A BRICKBAT

(This drawing depicts no actual incident in the book, but an amusing remark of Henry Tilney by way of illustration of a supposed fancy of his sister's. It is an example of the latitude which Hugh Thomson allowed himself when occasion seemed to require it.)

*From "Northanger Abbey", by Jane Austen, published by Macmillan & Co., 1897*

*Hugh Thomson's "Illustrated Fairy Books"*—and destined to be the only one. The artist, with something of a child's delight in fearsome "make believe", had rendered the story all too realistically for the taste of those grown-up folks who are the buyers of children's books. Most healthy children themselves find delight in the weird and gory—hence the lasting vogue of stories such as this particular one—but their elders, for the most part, forget that early trait in themselves, and their love of Grimm and the rest, and regard their youngsters as delicate sentimentalists, to whom the grim and gory would be shocking. Thus it was that the monstrous giants of Hugh Thomson's imagining failed to win popularity, and that, in spite of all the glory of riotous colour and fantastic atrocity, the series did not pass beyond this tentative first quarto-size pamphlet.

Then came a couple of exhibitions. At the time when the Thomsons moved from Vernon Mansions to 5 Playfair Mansions, also in Queen's Club Gardens, in September 1897, Hugh Thomson was asked, through the Macmillans, to lend a collection of original drawings for exhibition as the central feature of the *Conversazione* of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, January 10–13, 1899; the artist duly received the thanks of the Committee for having made that year's gathering "ever memorable"; and there followed immediately a display at the Continental Gallery, in Bond Street, of a selection of seventy-seven of his drawings under the title of "England in the Days of Our Great-Grandmothers", the introduction to the catalogue moving the artist to write to the author, "I have been swallowed up in the flood of gratification which your writing has given me". It was highly successful, the sales reaching a gross sum of £747. It appears to have been at this exhibition that Thomson first adopted the notion of tinting some of his drawings. He was always hankering after colour, and was gratified by the cordial reception accorded to the innovation, not only as reflected in the sales, but in such praise as reached him. Joseph Grego,





“AFTER HE HAD GLUTTED HIS APPETITE UPON THEIR CATTLE, HE  
WOULD THROW HALF A DOZEN OXEN UPON HIS BACK, AND TIE  
THREE TIMES AS MANY SHEEP AND HOGS ROUND HIS WAIST,  
AND SO MARCH BACK TO HIS OWN ABODE”

*From Hugh Thomson's Illustrated Fairy-Books, "Jack the Giant Killer"*  
(Macmillan & Co., 1898)

(Reduced in size)



CORMORANT CARRYING OFF CATTLE SHEEP AND HOGS

not fit in our times; besides, I wanted to fish, he wanted golf. . . . What I found then was that the work was [to him] a welcome change. To be



THE CHURCH

From "*Donegal and Antrim*", *Highways and Byways series*, by Stephen Gwynn, published by Macmillan & Co., 1898

(This sketch has been pronounced one of Hugh Thomson's happiest studies of Irish character)

let draw landscape and not figures only was much: but to be let draw Irish landscape and Irish character was a joy.

Early in the summer had come a suggestion from Mr. John Murray that Hugh should illustrate, after the manner of his *Cranford*, George Borrow's *Lavengro* and *Romany Rye*; but the proposal came to nothing, possibly because the artist



was already sufficiently occupied—for Macmillan's he was engaged on drawings for a children's story-book, Mrs. Mole-



THE REVELLERS, BEWITCHED BY MOTHER SHIPTON, "SAT LAUGHING FOR FULL A QUARTER OF AN HOUR"

From "*Highways and Byways of Yorkshire*", by Arthur H. Norway,  
published by Macmillan & Co., 1899

worth's *This and That*, and by George Allen he had been commissioned at his own suggestion to illustrate Charles Reade's *Peg Woffington*. In letters to different members of the Allen family we have pleasant indications that he was

more nearly satisfying himself over the work, and also of his generously volunteering to do extra illustrations "to save awkward fitting". A spell of illness or depression again meant delay, and the work was taken to Ramsgate, whence, in writing to Miss Grace Allen, he reported (August 23) how both he and the work were improving: "I hope to let you have 16 drawings by the end of the week or beginning of next. In some ways I think them more successful than any which have gone before, but that may be the result of the improvement in my own spirits since I got to the fresh air of the sea side. One's views are coloured so by one's liver, if I may be pardoned for referring to that obscure organ, the exact situation of which I am ignorant of, although it is referred to as an old acquaintance. . . . I have settled practically the subjects of all the designs which remain to be executed, and they will pan out all right, I fancy." A week later, writing to Mr. Hugh Allen, he says they are returning to town in a day or two, and adds: "I am late with the drawings, but the last few days during which I have been 'touching up' have not gone well. I divide the days into those when every line runs correctly—the other days when every line runs wrongly, and these latter make me ill, positively. All due to the state of the tummy-tum I fear." It must have been well into September before the drawings were completed, for, writing to Miss Grace Allen after the return to Playfair Mansions, Hugh announced that he had finished up to the end of Chapter XI., but that Chapter XIII., the last, was a very long one and would need more illustrations; "the great scene of the story takes place in it, and it would never do to leave this scene unillustrated".

At length the work was completed, and *Peg Woffington*, published at the beginning of November, was hailed as a new triumph. In reply to one letter of congratulation Hugh declared that it had lifted him out of an attack of the "depression which so often visits writers and artists". To another friend he wrote: "I should be more than human if I could resist displaying with pride to my acquaintances such a testimonial

from an authority on art, besides showing them as well that delightful picture of Charles Reade in the Celestial regions



"Whilst Triplet sat collapsed"

(Whilst Triplet sat collapsed from disappointment, Peg swept into the green-room, rehearsing a man's part)

From "*Peg Woffington*", by Charles Reade, published by George Allen, 1899

drinking *my* health. I hope he has reason to expect me there. You see I take all your flattery in, and am happy—which you wished me to be. As to Thackeray—before I started to try my fortune in London I made for my own



SIR CHARLES POMANDER IN THE GREEN-ROOM OF GOODMAN FIELDS THEATRE  
WAITING FOR MRS. WOFFINGTON

*From an original drawing in the possession of Mrs. M. H. Spielmann, made for  
"Peg Woffington", by Charles Reade (George Allen, 1899)*



pleasure a set of drawings illustrating *Vanity Fair*. The best of them I gave away years ago after they had procured me work on the *English Illustrated*. Some of them I still have, queer overworked productions. I hope when you do come to see us to show them to you. Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens would content me were I deprived of all the other fiction in the world, and I am a glutton for fiction."

During this autumn Mrs. Thomson had been suffering a long and painful illness, and when she was recovering Hugh was bowled over by a bad attack of influenza, and his eyes became so affected that he could not work, neither could he write nor read. As to the latter fresh trial, he spoke of his comfort in "my wife's devotion which has supplied my wants; and I am astounded when I think of the number of books which she read aloud to me". His illness brought from Austin Dobson a tribute of delightful verse:

Dear Limner of delightful Peg,  
I cannot come to "make a leg",  
And wish you better;  
Accept, instead, my kind regards  
On this, the neatest of my cards,  
In lieu of letter.

If Fate had only put to bed  
Some undistinguished Tom or Ned  
We might have hardened;  
But to lay hands—at Christmas too—  
On our unique, unrivall'd H—gh,  
That can't be pardoned!

It brought him, too, a letter from Judge Dodd, which, with its deep Irish feeling and whimsical humour, had all the cheering effect upon him which his good friend intended:

26 FITZWILLIAM SQUARE,  
DUBLIN, Dec. 9, 1899.

MY DEAR HUGH—I was telling them at dinner today some of the pranks you were guilty of, when the children and I were over in London, and my account was received with approval. And "that reminds me——", Well it reminds me of a lot:







To begin with, did you see that a Christmas book with that title has been put upon the market? It reminds me further of the indirect method, by which I have always indicated my appreciation of your kindness and Mrs. Thomson's. It suits our Northern temperament and appetite for reticence, where feeling and sentiment are involved, to express ourselves by gibe and jest instead of direct utterance. A radical mother has no stronger expression for endearment than to call her child, "a young tory rogue". I have often had it addressed to myself. Permit me however, just for once Hugh (I promise not to do it again) to *say* how much I value your continued kindness and goodwill to me and mine, and still more (if you will permit me) how much we all feel to your wife for her unselfish and thoughtful consideration for us all. We owe her even more than that for her care of you, and her loyal devotion to you.

"What has come over the Serjeant" I hear you say. "This is not like him!" I know it is not. Sure I said that before I commenced. But then you see you do not know (what I do) that Bob sent on to his wife your letter to him, and that she showed it to me, and that my imagination has been at work picturing you so full of life, and wit, and mirth, and spleen, with your eyes ever on the alert, for the humorous, the grotesque, condemned to spare those eyes, in a darkened room, to lower that vitality to the influenza pulse, and to draw upon your wife for eyes and vitality as you had heretofore drawn upon her for everything else. And my heart is sad for you, and I cannot refrain from writing, and when writing I cannot adopt the usual tone of banter and persiflage, and must just for once say straight out how much you are to us, and how we revere and love you.

All the same, Hugh, I would tell you to be of good cheer. This sickness is not unto death, nor unto loss of sight, and artistic power. You will be all right in a short time, and be the same touchy, testy, pleasant fellow as before.

And now I may tell you what made them merry over you at lunch. It was the account Isobel gave me of "Cousin Hugh" on that day after I parted with you.

"Did you see Cousin Hugh, father?" "No, I did not." "Well, when he saw you getting Elsie out of the cab, he ran away."—"So! you let him come up with you after all."—"I could not help it, father, and he took tickets for us at the train, and everywhere." "Oh, well, my dear, it is but natural. He is a man, and kind, and you are but a child." "No, father, you forget. I am a wumman. I was 18 my last birthday, and I have my hair up."—"Well, well, never mind. Hugh must have his way." "But he hadn't, father!" "Why, how so?" Here came a ripple of laughter from "the wumman". "Well, you see, father; I slipped the money into his pocket, when he wasn't noticing." "*The* money, how



much money?" "I don't know, father, but I think it was enough." "Enough, my dear, do you mean enough to pay for the dinners we got?" "Oh, father, you're almost as mean as Cousin Hugh!"

As you know, I am, or almost.

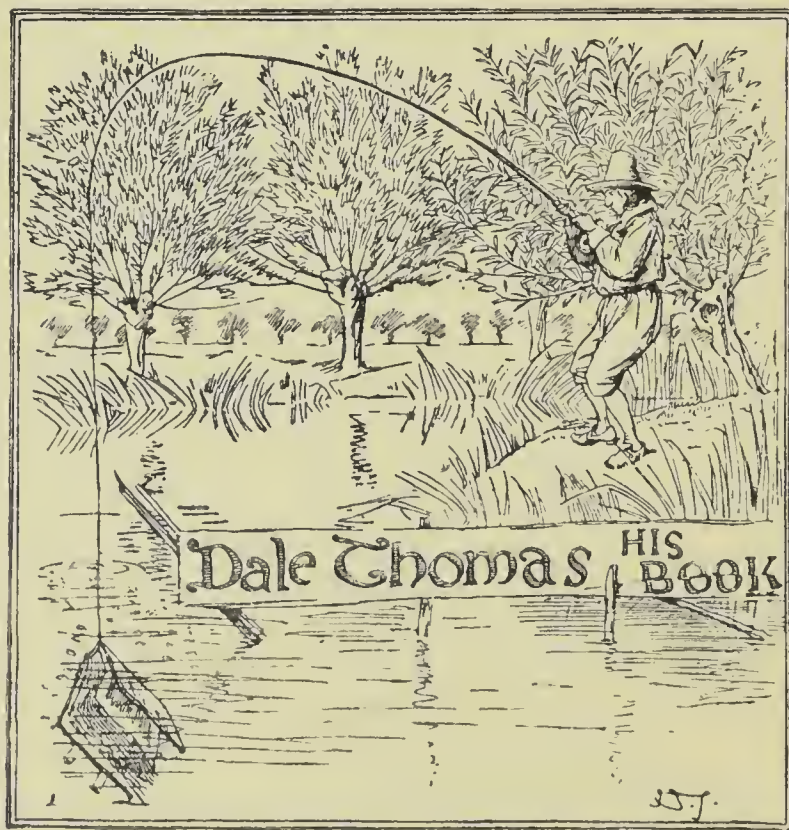
I only meant to write a line, and I have overflowed. "And that reminds me——" No, it does not. I will not be beguiled into continuing this kind of thing.

I hope I may have done you some good, at any rate no harm, and I have relieved my own feelings, and that is something.

May I say, that my bank balance at present is plethoric, and if you are in need of any of the ready to tide you over your time of sickness, it is at your disposal. I have had an exceptionally good sittings.

You will probably be offended at this, but I don't care one button whether you are or not. It will do you good to rouse you.

I do not feel as if I could stop, Hugh, but I really must not break ground on another page. Give my greetings to the Scholar.—Yr. affectionate friend,  
W. H. DODD.



THE BOOK-PLATE OF MR. DALE THOMAS

(The angler offering to the fish every encouragement as to choice and taste)

*Lent by Carmichael Thomas, Esq.*

## CHAPTER V

*HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS, A KENTUCKY CARDINAL,  
EVELINA, AND ESMOND*

1900-1905



EARLY in 1900 Hugh heard from his old friend of the Marcus Ward days, John Vinycomb, who asked for the loan of a number of drawings for an exhibition to be held to inaugurate the extension of the Belfast Linen Hall Library: "I hear nothing but that you keep up your reputation to high-water mark in all you do. Your name and fame are wide-spread here in the North as you well know." That his fame was indeed becoming "wide-spread" in a world larger than that of Ulster was shown in fashion more pronounced this year by the letters of appreciation, requests for "just a little drawing", autographs, etc., that were reaching him from strangers from far regions—from Perth, Syracuse, New York, Baltimore, Poverty Bay, New Zealand, Carlisle, and elsewhere. Correspondents who seek to use flattery and hero-worship for enriching their collections can surely not realise the cumulative tax that such appeals make on the time of the artists and authors to whom they are addressed; and Thomson all too frequently found it impossible to resist the artfully couched applications. Whether or not he was ever really conscious of the extent and reality of his fame may perhaps be doubted; he was certainly never self-conscious about it. Mr. Vinycomb's statement that he kept his reputation at high-water

The Initial letter is from *Pride and Prejudice* (George Allen).

mark would have been true right on through his working life. His devotion to the work to which he had felt impelled from the first was such that he ever sought to put his best into it, declining various offers of mere "pot-boiling" tasks in order that he might, as far as possible, undertake only those in which he found something of sympathy with his subjects.

Hugh's connection with the *Highways and Byways* series had led to a happy variation of his work and to his developing that side of it in which he had always found delight, though at first, as we have said, he had been able to employ it little more than as a setting to figure subjects. Several critics of his earlier handling had pointed to the artist's admirable use of landscape as background, and early in 1900 this aspect of his art was emphasised, for at the Continental Gallery was held an Exhibition of Tinted and Black and White Character-Drawings from the Highways and Byways of Great Britain and Ireland, and of Jane Austen, the writer of the introduction to the catalogue making special mention of this side of the artist's work. "We fancy that most people will agree with us that these drawings exhibit all the natural freshness of those of a true student of landscape. People acquainted with the artist's figure-work know with what simple and easy grace he lets the landscape often play a part in his picture; but here, in this series of out-in-the-open-air studies, he has had another expression of his art, and our belief is that he has not missed it."

During this year Hugh Thomson's work was to have been mainly on the *Highways and Byways in London*, and the illustrating (for the Macmillan Company of New York) of James Lane Allen's masterly novel, *A Kentucky Cardinal and Aftermath*. To the publishers the author wrote: "Just a word to say that I have not been able to lay hold of anything to aid Mr. Thomson with the illustrations. He would best be guided by the prints of the period. The dress in the United States was about like that of England I fancy." The story so



delighted the artist that he expressed great regret when the illustrations were finished, and that he had had to "knock off the drawings in a few months" when he would have liked to



"THEN THE THREE GENERALS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY DESCENDED IN A BODY"

*From "A Kentucky Cardinal and Aftermath", by James Lane Allen,  
published by Macmillan & Co., 1901*

spend a year over them. Work on these two books was held up by recurrent illness. Then in August came a request from the Editor of *The Studio* for examples of his pen-and-ink drawings for a special number of that magazine, and a further proposal that he should illustrate a story written by Mrs.

M. H. Spielmann for *Little Folks*; but these invitations reached Hugh when he was in hospital and about to undergo an operation—a fresh trouble which proved more serious than had been anticipated.



“WHEN MRS. WALTERS FED HER HENS, DID NOT THEY LAY BIGGER EGGS?”

From “*A Kentucky Cardinal*” (Macmillan & Co.)

For about two years after that the artist was more or less incapacitated; yet there were ups and downs in health and spirits, and a certain amount of work was done. At the end of September 1900, in the course of a letter he said: “Complications ensued from the operation which, besides scaring



me thoroughly, left me so weak that I was fit for nothing but to sit in the sun and wonder whether I should ever be fit again. But these last few days enable me to laugh at my forebodings and to think of life and work again." Then shortly after comes, in a letter to Mrs. Spielmann, "Like the barometer I was low yesterday, and unable to write at once to say that I fear you will give me quite too good a conceit 'o' myself'. . . . A day in bed like yesterday makes me feel quite 'a giddy young thing'. The artistic temperament (by which I excuse all my shortcomings) is not very patient, and otherwise I might have been thoroughly right long ago." And a few days later, "I think I spy a silver lining and certainly hope soon to be in ridiculously good health".

Meanwhile a signal honour allowed him a glance at that "silver lining" of which he had spoken. He was among the few black-and-white artists who contributed to the British Section of the Paris International Fine Art Exhibition of 1900—du Maurier, Linley Sambourne, Bernard Partridge, and L. Raven Hill forming a strong *Punch* contingent, with Granville Fell and C. E. Brock as well. To Hugh Thomson (represented by *Peg Woffington* drawings and "The Church", see p. 114) and Raven Hill fell the two awards of *Mention Honorable* by the verdict of the international jury. Yet Hugh cared little for this class of public competition, and, as a consequence, he rarely responded to invitations to contribute. But the writer remembers clearly the impression made at the great International Fine Art Exhibition at Rome in 1911 by his single drawing—that of "Beatrix and Esmond".

At about this time the Thomsons were again changing abode (in December 1900)—from Playfair Mansions to 27 Perham Road, West Kensington, which was to be their home for the next eleven years. Hugh was moved from his bed in the old home to his bed in the new one, and signalled the change by an attack of influenza, which was followed by a physical collapse which retarded his full recovery by many months. On Christmas Day the Editor of the *Graphic* and



his family despatched a friendly indication that he and his were kept in mind:

We, the undersigned, assembled together for our Christmas Dinner, in drinking the health of our old friend Hugh Thomson, wish him from this time henceforth a rapid and complete recovery to his former plump, contented and happy condition of life, and furthermore sincerely hope that the New Year may bring him and Mrs. Thomson and John such happiness that the present and past trouble may soon be forgotten.

Though full recovery was slow, Hugh was, from time to time during 1901, able to get on with his drawings for the *London* volume, some of which are dated as having been done in May, July, October, and December of this year, but there were many breaks when the state of his health made work impossible. He had duly completed the illustrations to the aforesaid story, *The Witch and the Jewelled Eggs*,<sup>1</sup> and was distressed because in one of the coloured pictures a pony had come out pink instead of white. Referring to one of his set-back periods of the spring, followed by a short stay at Folkestone, he said: "Then the daily black despair overwhelmed me, a state it is difficult for me to realise even at this short interval now my nerves seem nicely 'wrop up'. . . . Since my return from Folkestone I have put on weight and am actually seriously alarmed about 'my waist'. The benefit of the change was not very apparent to me at first but I am a new man these last two weeks. We go off to recruit John (our son) and to make me even more waistless, so that there is reason to anticipate that no automatic weighing machine will be capable of recording my gravity when we return. . . . I would have been to see you to thank you all in person this week, but suddenly meeting people with whom I have no acquaintance—which might chance if I made calls—has the most absurd effect on me (which shows that in spite of the added girth I still need bracing)."

During this year further public recognition of his work came in various ways. There was a request that Hugh should

<sup>1</sup> *Little Folks*, March and April 1901.



THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS BEWITCHED

In "The Witch and the Jewelled Eggs" (1901)  
*From "Littledom Castle", by Mrs. M. H. Spielmann*  
*(George Routledge & Sons, 1903)*







lend the *Piper of Hamelin* drawings for an Exhibition of Fairy and Folk Tale illustrations at Leighton House; in the special number of *The Studio* dealing with "Modern Pen Drawings"; in the announcement that the editor wished to have an illustrated article on Hugh Thomson's art, and asked for the loan of original work to supplement the selected reproductions; and in the interviewing of the artist for a popular journal<sup>1</sup> by Raymond Blathwayt, a writer who made a special art of interviewing celebrities. The ordeal of being interviewed was one from which Hugh Thomson would instinctively have shrunk, yet his frank expression of views and unself-conscious modesty must have made him an ideal subject for the interviewer. In their talk Blathwayt drew from Thomson the opinion that "Charles Dana Gibson has made some of the finest drawings in black-and-white work to-day. An artist's illustrations are worthless if they do not display some sense of character; even the most beautiful woman's face is nothing without character, for a mere pretty doll's face has no charm in draughtsmanship. Look at Reynolds, Romney and Gainsborough, all beautiful, and yet so distinct in character." Thomson was at the time still engaged on his work for the *Highways and Byways in London*, and in reply to the interviewer, who asked if he liked the women's costume of the day, the artist waxed enthusiastic: "Yes, I think that the last two years rival the costume of Gainsborough's time." [This, be it remembered, was in 1901.] "For the book on which I am now at work I went up to the Row several times to make sketches, and I said to a friend, 'Why doesn't some big painter make a picture of this?' Women catching up their gowns much as Japanese women do, and wearing Gainsborough hats; why, they are full of charm, and if properly grouped, such a picture would make a great sensation."

When questioned as to his work on *Cranford*, Hugh was reported by his interviewer, strangely enough, to have replied: "It was a great misfortune for Mrs. Gaskell that her

<sup>1</sup> *Great Thoughts*, 1901.



*Cranford* [1853] came out in the same year that George Eliot and Bulwer each published a novel, for her work was somewhat overlooked; and yet it is to the full as delicate as most of George Eliot's, and it far surpassed Bulwer Lytton; but she was swamped by the better known names". This statement is a startling one: either artist or interviewer is demon-



AN UNDERGROUND STATION

From "*Highways and Byways in London*", by Mrs. E. T. Cook,  
published by Macmillan & Co., 1902

strably wrong, for *Cranford* had been issued in book form four years before *Amos Barton*, George Eliot's earliest essay in fiction, appeared; while, so far from having been overlooked, it had appeared in nine English and four American editions between 1853 and 1890, as well as in French and Hungarian translations. Within twenty years after Hugh's illustrated edition had appeared there were twenty-nine further English and twenty-four American issues of the story.

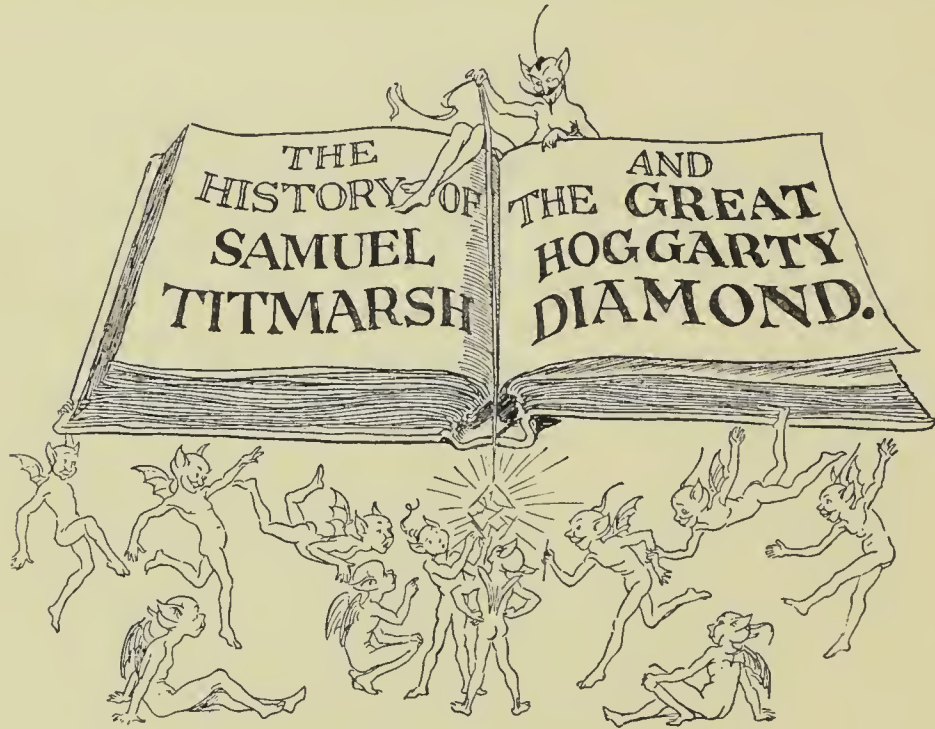
Asked by his interviewer if he had found the book easy to illustrate, Hugh is reported to have replied: "It almost illustrated itself, as it were; the characters were so exquisitely and distinctly realised. Some one once said that Shakespeare's characters were so modern; it was the same with the characters in *Cranford*, for every man must have then known them as a boy in his native village. I myself can remember two old ladies whom I knew as a boy, who might have stepped out of the pages of that book. It is that which has made *Cranford* so popular, for everyone recognises some friend of his own in the book. . . . One of the Manchester papers in speaking of my bits of scenery in that book which I used as background, said that I must know Cheshire well, for they were so faithful. This amused me very much; for as a matter of fact I had never seen it, having really done my country sketches from studies I had made on Wimbledon Common."<sup>1</sup>

Towards the close of the year came a commission for the rapid production of six drawings to illustrate *Ray Farley*, by J. Moffatt and Ernest Druce, a somewhat old-fashioned and melodramatic romance, in which the artist found but little inspiration.<sup>2</sup> This commission from Mr. Fisher Unwin was followed by a proposal that Hugh should illustrate S. R. Crockett's story *The Lilac Sunbonnet*, but the negotiations came to nothing. At about the same time, or a little later, came a proposal from Mr. Joseph Darton (of Wells Gardner,

<sup>1</sup> This was not the only occasion when highly intelligent readers have been similarly misled. It occurred also to Lady (Leonard) Cohen, who a good many years ago expressed herself thus: "*Cranford* as no doubt you know is Knutsford in Cheshire. I was born at Dunham Massy, a few miles away, and I always felt myself to be a Cranfordian. So it was an extra thrill to meet Hugh Thomson and talk with him of the dear book. I was praising his drawings of the country-side, as apart from the people, and I told him I thought I recognized the very fields (near Tatton Park) which he had used. H. T. smiled and said—'My dear lady, your praise is doubly pleasing because, as a matter of fact, I never was there'—(I think he meant never in the country, for he must have been in Knutsford)—'and all the drawings of fields and country-side were done on Wimbledon Common'." This is the more interesting as pure landscapes in the book are so very few.

<sup>2</sup> He spoke of it to me as 'my chief indiscretion, of which I am heartily ashamed; but then I was cruelly rushed by command of the publisher.'—M. H. S.

Darton & Co.) that Hugh should illustrate a book for them, the work fixed upon being Thackeray's *History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*. Here again business intercourse between artist and publisher developed into warm friendship. The latter's conception of himself as a man of business, wrote his son, "awakened in him genuine surprise that after meeting Hugh Thomson once or twice,



DESIGN FOR THE COVER AND TITLE-PAGE

*Published by Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1902*

there declared itself so much mutual sympathy, which ripened into sincere affection between artist and (self-styled) business man." It was, indeed, always the same; the simple sincerity of the man, the entire absence of any form of affectation or "side", rarely failed to turn acquaintanceship into friendship, and as Mr. F. J. Harvey Darton writes: "He had the same qualities of directness and modesty in his business dealings. When we asked him to work for us, he told us quite plainly and simply what his terms were (they were not at all high for a man of his reputation), and why he charged them: he





*"I knew that Somebody was come at last"*

(The Earl of Tiptoff accosts Lady Drum)

*From "The Great Hoggarty Diamond", by W. M. Thackeray  
(Wells Gardner, Darton & Co.)*

was not going to overproduce; he preferred to do a limited amount of work well, and he had to make a living. He was equally frank in matters of detail. I think we had some sort of written agreement with him, but I am quite sure we should have trusted his bare word in any business matter. But though he was so clear and explicit, he was also very generous in interpreting a bargain after it was made (not that there was any bargaining: it was a matter of stating plain terms and keeping them). For instance, one condition in our agreement (this related to a later work) was the return of his original drawings in due course (I think for the coloured ones his terms were £15 . 15 . – or so). When we were about to return them, he offered me one for a wedding present, and gave my father two others which he had specially admired. Thomson was not a rich man, as we know, and that was a really generous gift.”

*A Kentucky Cardinal* (first issued in America in 1894) had been published as a Hugh Thomson edition towards the close of 1901, and the *Highways and Byways in London* appeared the following year. In response to a letter of congratulation on his illustrations to the former he wrote: “I do not deserve all the nice things you say of my part of the book, although they make me glow with pleasure, but I had satisfaction in feeling that you and your husband, with your delicacy of feeling would enjoy the exquisitely told story”; and when early in 1902 there had come an invitation to select representative drawings to accompany an appreciation of his work he was distressed rather than delighted: “You must not think me silly or affected”, he wrote, “if I say that I really feel perfectly helpless in the matter of making a selection from my work. Its technical weaknesses glare so at me when I look at any one drawing, or bookful. But I will have a ‘good think’ as Talbot Champneys used to say,<sup>1</sup> and I will try by Friday . . . to have some work in my mind likely to do me less discredit. And I should

<sup>1</sup> In H. J. Byron’s comedy, *Our Boys* (1875).



so like to lean on you in the matter. Pity a poor self-distrustful ASS. I am really ashamed. By the bye any work in water colour has been of the most tentative character, one-day landscape sketches from nature and slight drawings of horses and men for amusement. These I should collect, if possible, and let you see, although they are probably of too unimportant a character to reproduce."

Early in 1902 came a suggestion that Hugh should illustrate one of the novels of Thackeray for a noble edition of that writer's works which an American publisher contemplated issuing.<sup>1</sup> Before the scheme was abandoned, Hugh's letters had shown that he was greatly interested. "I have always been keen on Thackeray and as a boy at home illustrated a good part of *Vanity Fair*—rummy drawings, some of which I have still. So that I welcome the chance to illustrate anything of his." And again—"Barring *Esmond* and *Philip* I should like any one, not already allotted, of the big novels, but I fear they are all likely to have been disposed of, and if so I place myself in your hands with regard to the minor works. My acquaintance with the latter is not very intimate so that I should prefer a choice being made for me. . . . Of the four remaining big novels *Pendennis* and *The Virginians* are my fancy for illustration, *Vanity Fair* being, I suppose, entirely out of the question and appropriated". Why it was that Thomson "barred" *Esmond* and *Philip* is not certain, but it is probable that they had already been mooted as possible subjects for his pencil in discussions concerning future work with his old publishers, for whom, as we shall see later, *Esmond* was actually done. It is probable that the commission from Darton to illustrate the *Hoggarty Diamond* followed close upon the abandoned American project, for the work was completed and published in the autumn of 1902. At the same time, too, was published Mrs. E. T.

<sup>1</sup> An immense undertaking projected, and afterwards abandoned, by the late Mr. G. D. Sproul. The editorship had been placed in the hands of the present writer, who had invited Hugh's partial co-operation.—M. H. S.



Cook's *Highways and Byways in London*, the last drawings for which had not been done until the summer owing to the condition of the artist's health.

After spending an evening with "his Spielmann friends" some time in March 1902, Hugh, on reaching home, sat down and wrote a characteristically "compunctious" note: "I am perfectly tormented until I can tell you how monstrous I feel



THE MEN IN BLUE

From "*Highways and Byways in London*" (Macmillan & Co.)

my behaviour to have been. I was 'struck all of a heap' when I got to the platform and saw the clock, and then came home in a stupor. But I am going to invest at once in a 5/- watch (guaranteed for a year) which same I shall probably forget to take when I go visiting, or if not, forget to look at, especially if you and your husband are so kind and entertaining. You see the sly way in which I am trying to shift the blame for the terrible infliction on you of which I was guilty this evening. I shall not be quite happy till break-

fast time to-morrow morning when this may reasonably be expected to reach you."

(So rarely did Hugh date his letters—in many instances they have fortunately been preserved in their post-marked envelopes—that it is amusing to find an American friend, Mr. G. M. Williamson, writing to him at this time: "Some 50 years from now when the letters of Hugh Thomson appear in the sale catalogues collectors will d—— you for not putting on the date".)

In the summer of 1902 another exhibition of Hugh Thomson's work was held at the Continental Gallery, mostly of the drawings he had made for *Peg Woffington*, which had been published nearly three years earlier, but including also "Scenes from an Irish Horse Fair", by Stephen Gwynn, which had appeared as a *Graphic* supplement, and other sketches. In the autumn, about a month after J. M. Barrie's *Quality Street* had been originally produced, there appears to have been a suggestion that Hugh should do some illustrative work in connection with that play; nothing remains, however, to indicate what the nature of the project was, further than a tantalising note to the artist from the literary agent. Ten years were to pass before the artist found himself in *Quality Street*!

By 1903 Hugh Thomson's health was so far restored that he could face the dual task of completing drawings for Fanny Burney's *Evelina* for Macmillans and *Tales from Maria Edgeworth* for Wells Gardner, Darton, so that there were two "Thomson books" for the Christmas season of that year. There are but few letters of this period, and none concerning the progress of the work. Both books were, however, completed and Austin Dobson, who wrote the introduction to each, sent a word of warm congratulation to the artist on receiving the *Evelina*: "I cannot go to my (more or less) balmy pillow without congratulating you heartily on *Evelina*. I don't think you have ever done better. Madame Duval is excellent, and much of the grouping (in my humble opinion) quite admirable.





"COME HERE, CHILD"

(Madame Duval breaking it to Evelina that "she had it in her head  
to make something of" her)

*From "Evelina", by Fanny Burney, published by Macmillan & Co., 1903*

You have never been happier in costume, too. I predict a genuine success!" The artist had felt at home, as it were, in



both books, and some of the drawings in *Tales from Maria Edgeworth* were hailed as being among the best work he had done. Compared with the Jane Austen's and some of the other books, however, these proved less popular with the book-buying public—such reprintings as were called for coming at longer intervals.

To Hugh's long illness and his very gradual recovery there succeeded the illness of his wife. Mrs. Thomson during two or three years had had an anxious and severely trying time, and in the summer of 1903 a stay in Switzerland was decided upon for their joint good. Just before they set out there came the news that the Ulster Arts Club had elected Hugh a member. Hugh acknowledged the compliment in a letter he sent to Mr. Vinycomb (June 21, 1903): "I need not say how gratified I have been by the honour which the Ulster Arts Club propose to confer upon me, and feel sure that their good opinions must have been nourished on the kind things which you, my old Master and friend, have often expressed concerning my work. . . . My wife and I start for Switzerland tomorrow, to see if a month's change there will bring us both up to the mark. She, poor wife, is run down through nursing and looking after me, and I hope the mountain air will bring her back to her accustomed health. I have a commission from the *Graphic* to make drawings if I choose, but I am not bound down if I don't feel disposed."

That he did "feel disposed" was shown when a four-page supplement to the *Graphic* appeared telling the story of "A Holiday in Switzerland" in thirty-four sketches, with accompanying text which the artist had all unconsciously supplied in the friendly letters which he had written to the editor. The only definite work he had taken with him was a new story, and in announcing that the drawings had been duly sent in, he wrote to the author a long letter showing his delight in his surroundings and demonstrating those qualities which made a letter from Hugh Thomson a joy to the recipient; that must be one excuse for printing it in full.

DEAR MRS. SPIELMANN, I deferred writing till I could say that the drawings had been despatched. I am able to say so now, and I hope you will not be horribly disappointed in them. I frankly confess that ever since we arrived here I have felt very limp, playful little thunderstorms zigzagging amongst the hills entertaining us at meal times and then parting to allow the sun to shine out between. The enormous meal too which is provided in the middle of the day has a most demoralising effect on one and instead of putting my legs under a table to work I feel more desirous of putting my feet on the mantelpiece. When I was a healthy little boy, always hungry, this hotel would have been a glutton's paradise to me. It is in every way a charming house to stay at, spotlessly clean, and with every delight in the garden which borders the lake. The proprietor is a flower lover and his roses, which adorn the tables and occasionally one's button-hole, fill the air with perfume. For any one in need of rest and quiet I can fancy no pleasanter spot. The pier at which boats call to drop passengers for the Rigi is within a hundred yards or so and yet on the parapet the lake looks like the ornamental water of a country house till the eye lifts to the prospect beyond. I like it much better than the grander or wilder part round by Brunnen. Here there is a magnificent inland sea of water with sylvan slopes towards Lucerne (if one's eye looks towards the right) whilst in front the crags opposite and to the left are bold enough to satisfy me. The snow still lies in their ravines. Over this broad stretch of water all the varying effects of light from morning till moonlit night play, and have a much finer appearance than in the more confined waters. Somebody told me Switzerland was not paintable. I have never ceased longing for the merest fraction of Turner's genius since I arrived. The wonders of varying light were never so exquisitely ready for the painter. But I have to keep to humdrum figure drawing and although I have been tempted to try an effect in water colour my mind is unsettled with respect to it, and my ill-success disgusts me when time is too precious to try again at once with the experience gained from failure. I should dearly like a holiday here with no thought for anything but paint and paper landscape. But of course you know it all so well that it is absurd for me to rhapsodise.

By the bye, we stayed a night in Paris visiting the Salon before starting on our further journey next day. You remember that you and I combined forces against your husband on the subject of Sargent's painting. We all agreed as to his magnificent technique but denied him charm. Well I am bound to say that I feel inclined to unsay everything and basely desert you after having witnessed the effect of his "Misses Hunter" in the Salon. The picture is hung among works of the kind I admire and am much interested in, and when I came on it it assumed all the air and tone and quiet dignity of an old master. In fact it seemed to

have, in the midst of the other pictures, sincerity, a quality I was always inclined to deny Sargent. This impression may have arisen from the contrast with the pictures I had been looking at, which were all more or less of an uncommon character as compared with our Academy. Indeed when I think of my limited experience of pictures, how seldom I go to picture exhibitions and consequently how little I know, I am ashamed to think how freely I express opinions in opposition to a man with the expert knowledge of your husband. I hope he did not think me very cheeky. I should never have had the courage if I had not seen you as bold as a lion.

But to return to the work. I sent five little drawings to the Editor of *Little Folks*, one of them an initial. I told him that he might use all if he liked and as regards cost he is not to be uneasy and is only to give me what he thinks fit and can afford. I don't expect him to pay me what he did for the last work I did for *Little Folks*. I am only sorry that you may feel disappointed in what I have done. Your stories are so full of subject that the difficulty is to select, and my theory is, that little vignettes following the story each consisting of one or two or more figures as occasion might demand would be a much better plan of illustration than page drawings. But again you must not think me dogmatic. This is only my opinion advanced as suggestion. And perhaps it is my feeling simply because it has been my method all these years in which I have done book illustrations and the moment a full page is asked I feel it should be done with a paintbrush and a pot of lamp black otherwise it will not look important enough.

Our third thunderstorm today is coming up and another table-d'hôte is looming and my page space is getting smaller. Besides my rigmarole may be very trying to read, as all these accumulated atmospheric and gastronomic antics have made my handwriting a little unsteady. I find myself inclined to German Style as the very easiest to write under the Circumstances\*<sup>1</sup> and have given way for a moment. Please excuse my little outbreak. Nerves are not sufficiently under control. My wife joins me in very kind regards to you and yours. We hope you have not lost your son yet. We wish him all success in Germany when he goes there but ask him on no account to adopt the handwriting.\*<sup>1</sup>

I sent the drawings by Regd. Parcel Post as well as I could manage at the little local post office. The Postmaster General of the imposing place kept calling me back and demanding more centimes for some few times, so that I think he had never sent a regd. parcel to Angleterre before and is very vague indeed yet, as to whether he has done the right thing. Perhaps if the drawings are lost it will be a good thing for the story. I know it tells itself in the most delightful way. We trust you

<sup>1</sup> At each of the places where an asterisk here appears Hugh had written a few words in a flourishing Gothic fashion as mock German calligraphy.



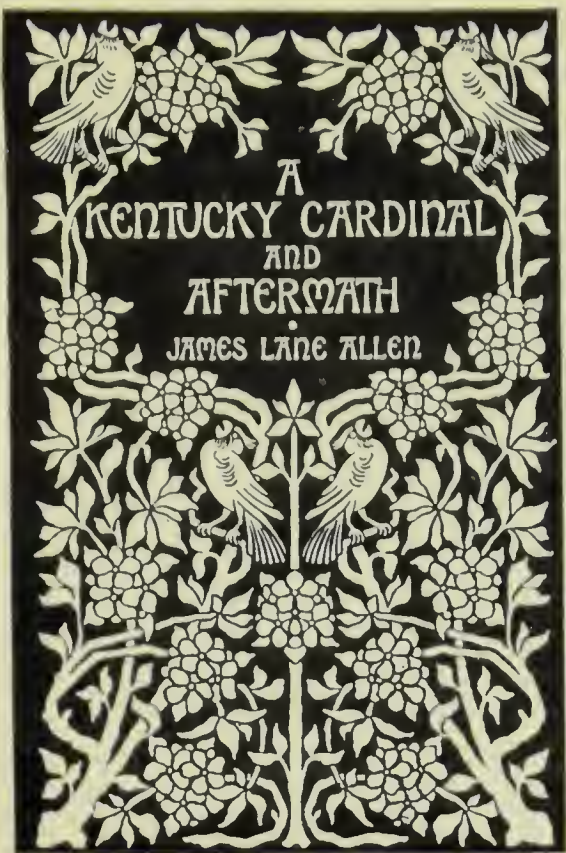
are keeping in good health and with the best remembrances I remain—  
Always yours very sincerely, HUGH THOMSON.

Pleasant as was the stay in Switzerland it did not effect any permanent improvement in Mrs. Thomson's health, and before the end of the year she had to undergo a serious operation. Hugh had had for a time to thrust everything in the way of work aside, "and I am only awaking to a sense of all that I have neglected now that the patient is happily recovering. She has been in wretched health for the last few years but there is now a prospect of brighter days and sounder health." She had, as he said in a later letter, "concealed in the bravest way" the malady from which she had been suffering, all the time that he had been an invalidish "ne'er do well". For several years the health of his wife continued to cause Hugh constant anxiety, as those who knew him intimately were aware, though he maintained to the outer world of casual acquaintance an ever engagingly cheery demeanour.

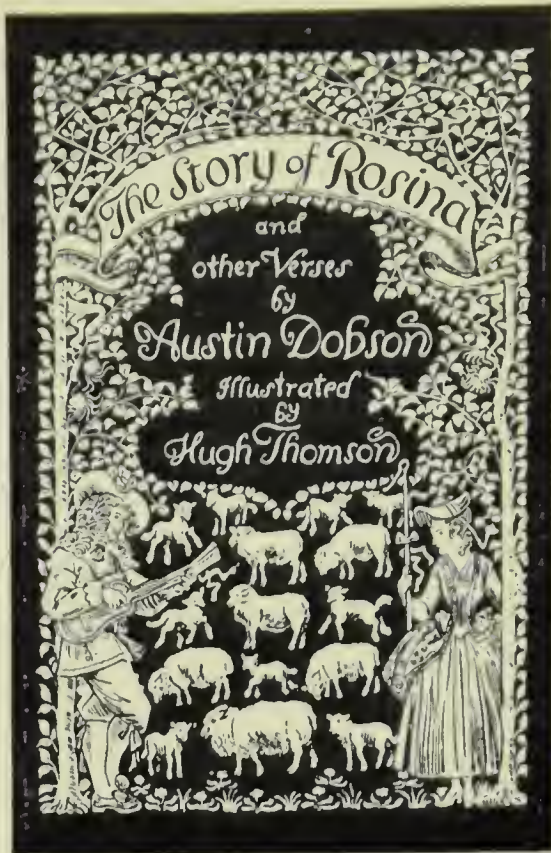
Early in the year 1904, writing to our highly esteemed and most excellent friend Walter Jerrold (who, alas, passed away even while working upon these pages), in cordial response to a suggestion that he should join a club that for some years dined annually about the anniversary of Charles Dickens' birth, Hugh said, "I should like very much to join the Boz Club, and think it most kind of you to give me the chance. It is a jolly list of names, and jolly cheap, and is sure to *make* one jolly—at least once a year—and what could one wish for more." He attended several of the annual dinners of the Boz, and was always a charmed and charming table-companion. Though not in the ordinary sense of the word a "clubman", Hugh Thomson was a man eminently clubbable, as would be endorsed by all alike who met him at golf clubs to which he successively belonged at Seaford and Wimbledon, and later at Sidcup, or who were his near neighbours at the occasional gatherings held by the Boz Club, by the Titmarsh Club, and, later on, by the Fireside Club.

A third book which was undertaken for Wells Gardner,





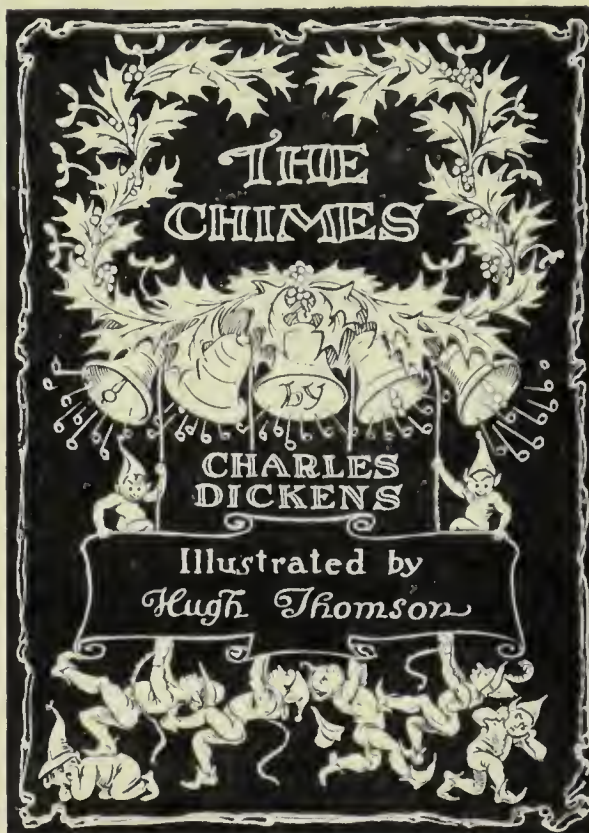
1900



1895



1899



1913

A GROUP OF HUGH THOMSON'S DESIGNS FOR BOOK-COVERS  
printed in gold on dark-coloured cloth, wherein the artist sought to express the  
spirit or subject of the book



Darton provided the artist's main task for 1904, but it is probable that much of the work was done during the preceding year. This was the admirably presented *Tales of the Canterbury Pilgrims*, by Mr. F. J. Harvey Darton. "The Chaucer period was an experiment for him, but I think he enjoyed it", Mr. Harvey Darton says. "He loved the humour of the characters. I was fortunate in being able to lend him some edition of the



HEADPIECE TO "THE FIRST DAY AT THE TABARD: THE BEGINNING OF THE PILGRIMAGE"

*From "Tales of the Canterbury Pilgrims", by F. J. Harvey Darton,  
published by Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1904*

*Tales* which contained reproductions of the Ellesmere MS. illustrations, and he was fascinated by them—by the humorous formality, the homely vigour, of the figures. From them he got the idea for his admirable cover design, which to me suggests just the right mixture of humanity and mediævalism, and romance." For this book Hugh did fifty-one page illustrations, and also thirteen others under a misapprehension. Of these Mr. Harvey Darton says: "So far as I remember, we meant my Chaucer book to be one of a series in regard to



which my father was keen on preserving a rather rigid uniformity of *format*. . . . My father asked him to stick to the full-page scheme for the rest, of course, saying we would pay in the usual way for these irregular ones; but he refused to be paid. They were used, I think, reproduced on a very small scale, as initial decorations."

The refusal to be paid for work that he had done under a misapprehension of the publisher's intentions was characteristic of Thomson's way of interpreting a contract. Of his care, too, in the reproduction of his work we have further evidence from Mr. Harvey Darton, who tells us that Hugh was "rightly particular about technique in reproduction. He did not like the fineness of his line impaired by coarse reproduction, and was insistent on the need for good metal for the plates, so that the line should not be blurred, and on a good ink and paper, to prevent the shadows filling up and printing too black. (He pointed out to me a number of technical faults, from his point of view, in the work of another artist whose style seemed to be modelled on his.) He admitted that he often drew faultily himself, from an anatomical point of view: but I doubt if he really regretted it. . . . All his conversation about his own work brought out one feature—his sincerity and his love of it: he could not illustrate what he did not like, but into what he liked, he put his genuine self always."

To Harvey Darton's *Tales of the Canterbury Pilgrims* an introduction was written by Dr. F. J. Furnivall—who had founded the Chaucer Society in 1868, and who at the time of the publication of Mr. Darton's book was just on eighty years of age. While the artist was still at work on the volume, or just after he had completed it, all concerned in its production met at dinner at the Thomsons in Perham Road—when the party of eight or nine included Joseph Darton, the publisher, Harvey Darton, the author, F. J. Furnivall, the introducer, and the host, the illustrator of the *Tales*. The author, recalling the occasion, says that Furnivall talked vigorously and well; "the only detail that lingers in my head

is Furnivall's eulogy of Ruskin's madeira, which had been to the Cape and back, and when it was brought in its fragrance scented the whole room". Furnivall, writing with characteristic candour to Hugh the following day, said: "Mr. Darton has kindly sent your illustrations for me to see. They have much interested me, but don't draw me from the old ones, to which I've grown so accustomed that I can hardly do justice to the modern touch."



*Photo: Stearn & Sons*

JOHN THOMSON

Thus, as we see, Dr. Furnivall—ever the sympathetic and appreciative friend—remained always the perfect scholar: art, as such, made less appeal to him. He autographed a copy of the *Tales* for its author, who then begged Thomson to do the same, and "he not only did so, but drew a charming little sketch on the fly-leaf, of Furnivall with a long pipe, myself, and Chaucer looking suspiciously like a caricature of Hugh Thomson".

Just before Christmas 1904 came the intelligence that young John Thomson had been offered a scholarship at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Hugh, much cheered, opened the following year, 1905, by throwing himself with vigour and relish into the illustration of *Esmond* for Macmillans, a work in which he greatly delighted. Soon after there came another trip abroad, when Hugh went to Monte Carlo on behalf of the *Graphic*. The professional results of the journey were seen in a triple series of two pages of sketches in that paper, setting forth "An Artist's Visit to Monte Carlo", with accompanying text by the artist himself.

Hugh's appreciation of the *Graphic* and of those who con-





*Hugh Thomson 1904*

(The little Beatrix bidding young Henry to come, too, with her parents,  
Viscount and My Lady Castlewood)

*From "The History of Henry Esmond, Esq.", by W. M. Thackeray,  
published by Macmillan & Co., 1905*



ducted it was very deep and very sincere. "Carmichael Thomas and the *Graphic*", he wrote to J. P. Collins (May 25, 1909), "have been among the best friends I ever had. . . . C. T. is one of the best-hearted and most generous of men and I hope to Heaven all good will attend him and that the same convoy will embrace you." He more than suspected that several of the commissions that from time to time were given to him for pages of foreign scenes were neither less nor more than kindly subterfuges having the object of compelling him to take healthful holidays without expense — suspicions, we believe, not ill-founded.

In June a number of the Monte Carlo sketches were included in an exhibition of Hugh Thomson's work at the Doré Gallery, the main part of which consisted of tinted drawings made for *Evelina*, two years earlier. Then in the early autumn came an extended "working holiday" which was something of sheer joy to the artist. Mr. Stephen Gwynn, who in 1898 had collaborated with Hugh in the *Highways and Byways* volume of *Donegal and Antrim*, was contemplating the production of a couple of books on Ireland, and had asked Hugh to join with him as artist. "These were the illustrations for the book on which I was then engaged", says Mr. Stephen Gwynn—or rather the two books, because the scheme ran beyond the limits of one volume. But *The Fair Hills of Ireland* and *The Famous Cities of Ireland* are parts of one work, although the first was published in 1906 and the second in 1915. Thomson's work was issued by an Irish publishing firm—Maunsel & Co.—inasmuch as the whole conception, inspiration, and execution were regarded by the author as part of the Irish patriotic movement of the day.<sup>1</sup> It was a happy union of the forces of the North and South, and Hugh thoroughly enjoyed the partnership and the journeying, sometimes with the author, into hitherto unknown parts of the land of his birth. As he wrote to Walter Jerrold towards the close of a visit: "My wife is in Dublin and I am here [Kilrea] so that

<sup>1</sup> *Experiences of a Literary Man*, by Stephen Gwynn [1926].

your letter first forwarded to her has only just reached me. I am taking a few days golf after a very busy time all over Ireland, having seen more of my native country than ever before in my life. The towns in the South and West have a curious Continental feeling about them and the main street of Drogheda was like a dignified Canaletto on the afternoon I visited it. I have work to do on my return to Dublin and



THE QUAYS, WATERFORD

*From "The Famous Cities of Ireland", by Stephen Gwynn, published by  
Maunsel & Co., 1915*

do not expect therefore to be back in London for at least a fortnight longer. . . . I like the work I have been engaged on immensely. So far it has been almost entirely landscape and historical remains, and blow wind, blow rain, I care not, being well wrapped up in an Irish frieze coat and a feeling of perfect health." He had earlier, after a hot dry spell in London, written, "How jolly to see and hear the rain, but perhaps you don't feel the need of it as I do. An Irishman is really amphibious, and only that it sounds too sweet, he is also a duck—out of water—when the weather is too continuously fine.

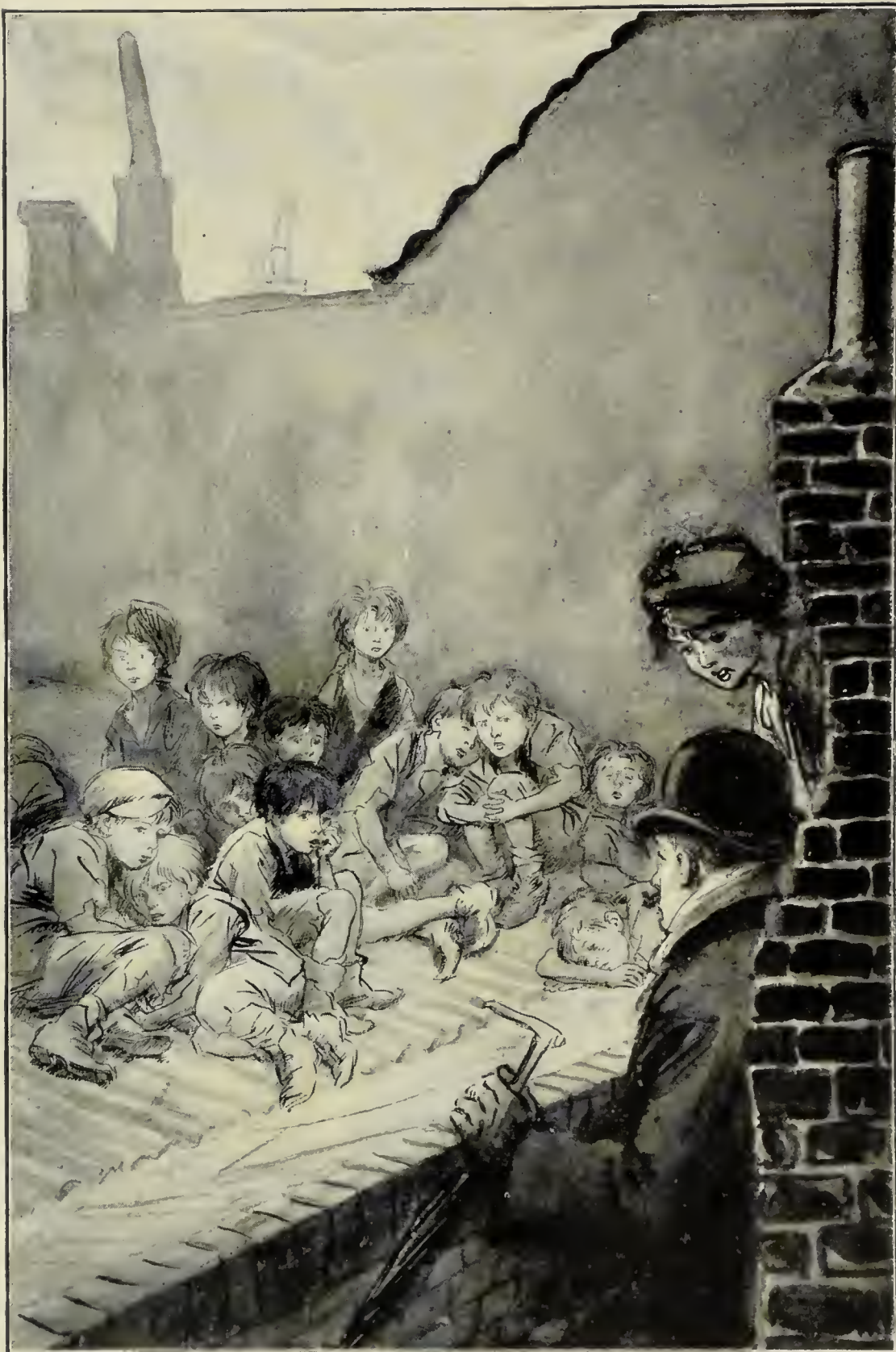
Man never is but always to be blest and another day or two of rain will make the duck, the amphibious one, grumble for the bright sunshine." While at Kilkenny on this pleasant employment, in writing to his old Belfast mentor, Mr. Vinycomb, he said: "I was greatly delighted with the verses you enclosed. All you have to do now is to score 1000 runs and take 100 wickets to prove yourself the most 'Admirable Crichton' of the age."

On his way home, *via* Dublin, Hugh stayed for a while with the Gwynns at Raheny, and, as Mr. Stephen Gwynn tells us, "He used to go into town constantly and come back in rapture with the beauty of the buildings. Eighteenth-century work made evidently a special appeal to him: and Irishman though he was he had never had the least inkling how good architecture was in 18th century Dublin. . . . He came back from dining with the Dodds in the more fashionable quarter of the town and told me how he had impressed on his host the inferiority of their houses to what was to be seen in the slums. 'Why couldn't he steal a fan-light from the north side?' he had wanted to know."

During this year, 1905, Hugh made an excellent tinted line and water-colour drawing of "Curling", a number of Scotsmen on the ice, full of life and humour, keenly engaged in the match. It was for the Scottish Widows' Provident Fund, and it was issued as their calendar for the following year. He had already produced for the Association a water-colour—an animated scene at Rugby football; not, however, quite so good. This was one of the few entirely commercial commissions accepted by the artist.







NOBODY'S CHILDREN

In *London at Prayer*, by Charles Morley (Smith, Elder & Co., 1909). "These were waifs too, all their little heads alert and their faces alarms"

*Published by Smith, Elder & Co., now John Murray*

## CHAPTER VI

IN KENT AND IN IRELAND

1906-1909



EARLY in 1906 there appeared in the *Pall Mall Magazine* the first of several contributions to that admirable miscellany made by Hugh Thomson—a series of delightful sketches of the children of the Foundling Hospital, in connection with which his friend Mr. J. P. Collins writes us the following reminiscence:

I was art editor to Charles Morley when he was running the *Pall Mall Magazine* from 1905 to 1910, and had the advantage that he (Hugh Thomson) and Morley had long been friends. There was something in the keen north-country temperament of the one that went well with the sunny sparkle and the beaming geniality of the other. Morley loved to pick a man's brain as a coster probes a winkle: Thomson always seemed amazed that anybody should think his opinions worth bothering about. Morley, with a passion for Dickens and a few older-fashioned authors, was a newsman born. Thomson was for ever laying the book down to study the man, and while indulgent and encouraging to beginners, never failed to test himself and them by a few exalted standards. I tried hard many a time to go round a few galleries or one-man shows with him, but he was afraid of dogmatising, even by appearance or implication. The task he undertook with the greatest pleasure, as far as memory serves, was illustrating Morley's account of the services at the Foundling Chapel, afterwards reprinted in *London at Prayer* (1909).<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Collins further tells how the editors of the magazine wished Hugh to accept many more commissions than he did,

The Initial letter is from *Tom Brown's School Days* (Ginn & Co.).

<sup>1</sup> Among the 21 pieces that comprised this admirable study three were provided with illustrations by Hugh Thomson: "The Poor Parish" [Father Richard's], "Nobody's Children" [Dr. Barnardo's]; and "Sunday in a Settlement".



“but he was too conscientious over his book work”. The chief book-work of this year was the illustrating, for Macmillans, of George Eliot’s *Scenes of Clerical Life*, and for this Mr. Collins was able to lend him many photographs of the “George Eliot country”. The work was carried on during a time of great anxiety as to the health of his wife. “Her operation nearly three years ago was one of the most drastic undertaken by surgery, and is at the root of all the trouble. Since then she has been four times under an anaesthetic for minor operations and the wonder is that she is still alive. . . . He [the doctor] has consulted most of his acquaintance and Sir Lauder [Brunton] looks us up frequently, but all they can say is that one must have patience.”

More than twenty years had elapsed since Hugh Thomson had left Belfast, and in the interval he had come to be acknowledged as in the front rank of artist-illustrators, when it was arranged by the Ulster Arts Club to hold in May 1906 an exhibition of his drawings. This exhibition was a matter of some moment to the artist, and an event of great importance in the intellectual life of Belfast. For it Thomson designed one of his dainty invitation cards—the bust of “Evelina” amid graceful ribbon scrolls held up by two flying Cupids—amorini just summary enough in execution to save them from being *bon-bon*. This card is one of the rarest items to reward the collector. The drawings, lent by Thomson himself and by certain collectors, to the number of threescore, comprised work from *Esmond*, *Peg Woffington*, *A Kentucky Cardinal*, and *Evelina*, and also from the *Highways and Byways* volumes, *Donegal and Antrim* and *North Wales*, together with others, including a couple of humorous sketches to *H.M.S. Pinafore*—(1) “*Sir Joseph Porter* (examining a very small midshipman): A British Sailor is a splendid fellow, Captain Corcoran”; (2) “*Bos’n*: It’s greatly to his credit, that he’s an Eee . . . nglishman!”

Thomson was “prevented” from being present at the opening, and from visiting the exhibition, but it may be sus-



"MR. ESMOND . . . HAD WRIT VERSES FOR HER, THAT SHE HAD SUNG  
AT THE HARPSICHORD"

*From "The History of Henry Esmond", by W. M. Thackeray (Macmillan & Co.)*

pected that it was as much his modesty as any other obstacle that was the true cause of his absence. Belfast, though de-



barred from welcoming the artist, hailed the display of his art with an outburst of enthusiasm—welcoming the work of the master who had quitted her at the end of his apprenticeship. Mr. Vinycomb, his well-loved instructor and mentor, as chief of the artistic staff of the Royal Ulster Works of Marcus Ward & Co., told something of Thomson's early life in the preface he contributed to the catalogue.

This drew from Hugh Thomson a long appreciative letter, in the course of which he talks about Vinycomb's own fine work as designer, illuminator, and heraldic painter of singular beauty and charm, and expresses once more his rapture in regard to colour:

The book-plate design is immensely effective, showing all your old skill. Not a feeble line or curve in it, and with all its crisp draughtsmanship preserving a rich archaic flavour. This is frequently absent from decorative pieces of the kind—an absence of soul, I suppose. Talking of soul, or want of it, could anything be more terrible than the facile smartness of *l'art nouveau*? And yet it needs a dexterous hand to design.

I often wonder, do you keep up your landscape painting? You had a great vein of imagination and beautiful colour, and I remember well the blues and greens of exquisite harmony which you used to blend in some weird cavern or haunt of dragons and mysterious creatures. Not that the little pictures needed any story for their interest. They were charming for their colour. The paintings glowed like a jewel or a peacock's plumage. And the mystery to me was how you managed to make blues and greens (which were to me cold colours) combine in such soft warm effects. The first time I had an opportunity of seeing Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" was taken advantage of, and with your landscapes in my mind, but the secret of it is still hidden from me. The colourist is born not made. Patient care and labour may make a draughtsman but it will only result in muddle and mess with colour.

[Hugh Thomson, by the way, was greatly interested on hearing from me<sup>1</sup> the opinion of one of England's greatest artists, Mr. G. F. Watts, R.A., upon the "Blue Boy". Reminding me that the great work was produced by Gainsborough in order to confound his mighty rival, Reynolds, who, in one of his discourses to the students of the Royal

<sup>1</sup> M. H. S. speaking.



Academy, had insisted on the necessity of very sparing use of a colour so cold as blue, Watts said: "That 'answer' was no answer at all. For the blue in the 'Blue Boy' is not blue at all, but a lovely broken colour full of warm rosy tints—a scheme which did not come within the purview of Reynolds's discussion." I thought of it a little while later when, at the Paris Salon, I was suddenly brought up by one of Léon Comerre's blue-clad ladies, and literally felt chilled as I stood before the icy colour. It is rather curious that several times in his later work Hugh Thomson made a number of very blue water-colour illustrations with striking effect.]

One other of Hugh's comments on the Belfast catalogue preface must be given, as an example of the artist's almost morbidly sensitive fear of being thought capable of giving even an unintentional hurt. He wrote further to Mr. Vinycomb: "The sentence about my connection with Macmillan & Co. is, of course, correct, but I sometimes think it would be more generous of me if I made some acknowledgment of the kindly and valuable interest they have always taken in me. My connection with them has been constant since you and I parted, and as an illustration of the way they do things I might instance their edition of *A Kentucky Cardinal*. The commission came to me from their American partner and the drawings were reproduced and the books printed in America. When this edition was sent to me I had a fit of the blues. Such an awful get-up as compared with what I had been accustomed to from the English firm. As soon as Frederick Macmillan saw it he said they would not issue it so in England, and he went to the expense of reproducing all the cuts, and had the book re-set and printed by R. & R. Clark of Edinburgh who had done the preceding books of the series so splendidly. And all this costly re-doing because they (the London firm) felt that the American sheets would do me harm. This is only one of several instances of the care of my work in the past, and I think I should acknowledge it."

In the summer Hugh had a visit from the art editor of the

*Ladies' Home Journal*, of Philadelphia, who was hoping "to secure from your gifted pen the illustration of a lively little story depicting the jollification of an old English Christmas". His mission was fruitless, for the illustrations were required in a few weeks, and Hugh was unable to accept the commission, his whole attention being required for completing



First Sketch for "The Clerical Meeting" in *The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton*  
From "*Scenes of Clerical Life*", by George Eliot, published by Macmillan & Co., 1906

the *Scenes of Clerical Life* in time for the autumn publishing season. With his work behindhand he had the added anxiety concerning his wife's health, for the stay at Littlehampton did not greatly benefit her; and in early October he wrote to Miss Grace Allen, saying "It is now nearly three months since we got back here [27 Perham Road] during which time she has been confined to bed and there is no immediate prospect of her leaving it". A few days later he wrote to the same correspondent: "I did not write the lecture on



health to your father [George Allen] which you, perhaps jokingly, asked me to do. As a matter of fact some people



THE CLERICAL MEETING

*From "Scenes of Clerical Life" (Macmillan & Co.)*

(Mr. Blair is no longer picking up his napkin, and less obtrusive chairs have been adopted)

dislike advice from outsiders as to what they should or should not do in such matters, and although your father and I are both *getting* old [Hugh was 46 and Allen 74] yet he is the



olderer of the two and might resent advice from a younger old crock to an older more experienced old crock."

In October *Scenes of Clerical Life*, with Thomson's illustrations, was published, and marked something of a departure from the series which started with *Cranford* fifteen years before, as sixteen of its illustrations were in colour. On the appearance of the book Hugh wrote to J. P. Collins, thanking him for the loan of photographs without which certain backgrounds would have been entirely fanciful.

During the preceding six or seven years, as we have seen, Hugh Thomson had contributed figure illustrations to four volumes of Macmillan's *Highways and Byways* series, the topographical drawings in which were the work of Joseph Pennell and Frederick L. Griggs, and had been responsible for wholly illustrating the volume on part of his native North Ireland. In October 1906 the publishers arranged for the addition to the series of a volume on Kent, and commissioned him to do the whole of the illustrating. He at once got in touch with the appointed writer, Walter Jerrold, and so began an acquaintance which ripened rapidly into friendship. Within three weeks came two notes beginning "Dear Sir", the two following began "Dear Mr. —", and then, "Please chuck Mr. in writing to me. It gives me a headache": thus was the geniality in Hugh Thomson ever ready to meet the congenial. In mid-November he was already going about on his bicycle, and within a week was writing to Austin Dobson: "I have been down in Kent sketching for a *Highways and Byways* volume, a commission which M. M. & Co. in their goodness of heart have given me. It has picked us all up astoundingly. My wife is, I think, really on the turn now, her spirits have risen because mine have." Though the work was begun in November, it cheered Thomson's country-loving soul to be out and about and doing his work at the same time. Later, in the same letter to Dobson, he said: "I have been uplifted the last few days by close proximity to other glorious art, and have had the impudence to try and draw the nave of Canter-



MERCERY LANE, CANTERBURY

*From the original drawing made for "Kent" in the Highways and Byways Series, published by Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1907*





bury Cathedral. The old phrase, 'a poem in stone', haunts one as one works there, and I bitterly regret that I never had any knowledge or appreciation of architecture imparted to me when I was young. I can only vaguely feel the impressive



DONAGH PATRICK CHURCH

*From "The Fair Hills of Ireland", by Stephen Gwynn, published by Maunse & Co., Dublin, and Macmillan & Co., 1906*

charm of it all and wonder at the inspiration of the old designers and builders."

In all letters at this time Hugh appears to have felt impelled to refer to the great Cathedral. Thanking J. P. Collins for a "too laudatory notice" of his share in the recently published *Fair Hills of Ireland*, he adds: "I have got back for a day or

two, having had the impudence to sketch crypts and naves and other architectural small beer in the wet weather, and Leather Bottles and Canterbury scaffolding when the rain cleared off, down in Kent. I am off again to-morrow to the South, Romney Marsh direction, and longing for the sun which hasn't favoured one much of late. Please tell C[harles] M[orley] of my fond remembrance, and of my goings on. He *might* pine if he didn't know just where I illuminated the landscape. Tell him I bathe the architecture in a soft lead pencil or pen and inky mist (usually and impressively called the poetic treatment). Seriously Canterbury Cathedral is so lovely that one can't help feeling how cheeky the attempt to draw it is."

From November until the following July Thomson alternated spells of cycling about Kent (sometimes in company with the author and sometimes alone), making sketches, with a few days at home in Perham Road, anxiety as to his wife's health making prolonged absences impossible.

One of the most characteristic things about Hugh Thomson was the lavish way in which he expended himself in devoting his art in the service of friendship. It would be impossible to compute the number of presentation books which he enriched thus with extra illustrations, or the sketches he made in friendly generosity. He declared that he could do better work thus than in carrying out a commission! As token of his gratitude for Sir Lauder Brunton's friendly attendance on Mrs. Thomson Hugh had sent a sketch to the distinguished doctor, who, thanking him for his "lovely picture", added "but I must remonstrate because you are too good. Once I thought such a thing was impossible. . . . A stray sketch that you would have dropped in the waste basket would have more than repaid me for anything I have done. You must now give me a chance of working for you without anything and by and by if you should at any time wish to give me something it must only be what you would otherwise have put in the waste basket. If you will allow me to say so I think





SILAS'S FOUNDLING EPPIE

"The small boys and girls approached her slowly, with cautious movement and sturdy gaze, like little dogs face to face with one of their own kind, till attraction had reached the point at which the soft lips were put out for a kiss."

*From "Silas Marner", by George Eliot (Macmillan & Co., 1907)*







you are too critical of your own work, and what you despise as not being up to your own standard others would prize.” Sir Lauder may have known how often the self-critical artist would make half a dozen sketches of a subject and cast them away, before being satisfied to let well alone.

At Christmas Hugh had sent books to Sir Lauder and Lady Brunton—presumably copies of the *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Fair Hills of Ireland*—in acknowledging which Sir Lauder wrote with equal generosity:

Your exceeding kindness makes me ashamed. I do so little for you and you overwhelm me with favours. I don't know how to thank you, but if I possibly can I will do the best to return your kindness by helping Mrs. Thomson to regain her strength. Both my wife and I are delighted beyond measure by the lovely books you have sent us and the marvellous pictures with which you have specially illustrated them for our benefits. When I think of you I am always reminded of some lines at school which I learned by heart without understanding them at the time:

Whate'er Lorraine light-touched with softening hue  
Or savage Rosa dashed, or learned Poussin drew.

Poussin's drawing was certainly good but it was in some respects at least not a patch on yours for with sharp lines you delineate expressions which Poussin could not have touched if he had worked at them for a century. Your drawings are beautiful and a joy for ever not only to us but to everyone who looks at them. I am so deeply in your debt that I beg of you not to increase the load by doing anything more either for my wife or me, but let me work off a little of my gratitude, so that I may not be overwhelmed by its weight.

During the week that opened with the receiving of this pleasant letter, Hugh Thomson was dividing his time between Kent and “homework”, the chief of which was illustrating George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, and a story by Mrs. Spielmann, of which he wrote: “Thank you so much for your hint as to the illustrations. If I keep fit and confident I may do all right, but if I grow nervous and full of loathing for every line I draw!—But I must not suggest such things to myself.” “If I keep confident”—even now, after he had attained his

exalted position in his own sphere, it seemed difficult for Hugh to be satisfied as to his own works.<sup>1</sup> Walter Jerrold, his collaborator in *Kent*, recalled how, early in



SAM WELLER

Drawn for the Boz Club Menu

their association, the artist said that after making his sketches on the spot he re-drew them in pencil and ink for reproduction, and seemed quite surprised at the suggestion that the actual first sketch was itself suitable for reproduction. At times, however, he would act on the hint, to the saving of his time and no lessening of the charm of his work. Writing to Jerrold on February 9 he had confessed, "I loathe town, and flourish and expand in the solitudes"; but the next day he was one of the large company, in which were included a number of personal friends, at the annual dinner of the Boz Club, to the menu of which

he had contributed his well-known striking sketch in black chalk of Sam Weller.

<sup>1</sup> Frequently, indeed, he would forbear to sign his work. The coloured picture he did for the Christmas number of the *Pall Mall Magazine* had to be returned to him for his signature, with the editorial comment, "Most artists think of that first!!! This is the highest compliment I can pay you—it is Thomsonian."

Before the month was out came a fresh attack of illness to hinder him in his work; but in March he could write, "We are beginning to get round the corner and my wife will I think recover"; and in early April he and his son could take "little excursions into temperature", and were sent away to recruit, and spent some days tramping the South Downs. "John and I experienced the greatest benefit in a short time from the walking over the heather and turf on the top of the Downs day after day. . . . What a delight it was; the bleating of sheep, the crowing of cocks and singing of larks and other birds, together with all the mingled sounds of country life which came up from the Weald filled me with ecstasy." And the return home was marred by finding his invalid wife once more a victim of influenza. From Tenterden, at the end of the month, he wrote to Walter Jerrold: "We have had an awful winter, my wife despaired of twice, and now she is so weak that she is unable to move. Just before Easter she had been carried several times into a chair, once too many as influenza gripped her and undid all the happy gains in strength. It has about bowled my nervous system (never very strong) over, to see such suffering, and it is a Godsend to have this work to take me away. I hope by the time I reach your part that I shall be fit enough to think and write less about our troubles." It was but rarely, and then only to close friends, and half apologetically, that Hugh Thomson let out what was for some years a constant anxiety.

The *Highways and Byways in Kent* was duly completed and published in the autumn, as was also the *Silas Marner*, and Hugh's work on the former was so well appreciated that he was commissioned to illustrate the *Surrey* volume of the series, and by October was already at work on that county. Mr. Eric Parker, who wrote the book, says: "I felt throughout my correspondence with Hugh Thomson that if I met him we should be friends at once; indeed, I regarded him as a friend and felt that he thought in the same way as myself, although we never met".



On the appearance of the Christmas number of the *Pall Mall Magazine* Hugh wrote to Charles Morley, the editor, one of those engagingly rollicking letters with which he favoured certain of his friends, expressing appreciation of Collins's work: "My dear Morley, Many thanks for your



ABBOT'S HOSPITAL, GUILDFORD

*From "Highways and Byways in Surrey", by Eric Parker, published by Macmillan & Co., 1908*

beautiful Xmas number. I had already got it, and was delighted with it, and with J. P. Collins's really charming, spirited, rolling, globe-trotting, Jolly Roger, walk the plank, hey presto, moidore, doubloon, skull and cross bones, lean piratical craft, loving papa and very spoiled-baby, want-another-story Poem. There's a lilt in it that makes one feel one hasn't got one's sea legs properly yet."

Early in 1908 Austin Dobson, who had contributed a couple of papers on the work of "Two Modern Book Illustrators"—Kate Greenaway and Hugh Thomson—to the *Art Journal*, was revising them for inclusion in a volume of collected essays. He wrote in March to Hugh: "I have just written the last line of the little paper on you. It ought to have been wrought in honey and gold, as Leigh Hunt said of a picture by Stothard, not with the glucose and margarine of commercial criticism. But I have done my best. On Monday it will, I trust, go to the type-writer; and if, at any date thereafter, you could spare me an hour, either here (at Ealing) or at the National Club, or elsewhere, I should be much indebted to you. Hutt has given me *Kent*, which I regard as a triumph." Dobson's delightful essay in appreciation duly formed a part of his volume *De Libris*, and was published towards the close of the year.

While in the first half of 1908 Thomson was busy completing the drawings for the Surrey volume he was given a further commission to illustrate a volume on Middlesex for the same series. Indeed the work on the two books overlapped, for in May, while asking for a list of Middlesex places that specially called for illustrating, he said: "I have not finished Surrey yet. Jupiter Pluvius and his various eccentricities and the moral and intellectual damage which he has inflicted on me have much retarded that great work. But if the World will only be patient it may yet see the completed magnum opus." To his Surrey collaborator, Mr. Parker, he wrote: "Surrey, especially in the Frensham locality, was a revelation to me, and I stayed a week at a jolly little pub on the top of Hindhead, where there was a wonderful waiting maid, a kind of female Caleb Balderstone, and a collection of animals, mongrel, puppy, whelp and hound, and guests that would have made excellent copy for a comic sketch. Had I not been wretchedly seedy I would have written you all about it at the time (not with any view to your book, but as worth your while studying for a slight paper). I heard whilst there

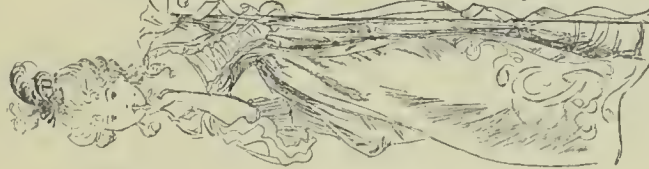
that Rhoda Broughton or Helen Mathers or some one of that school had put the maid into a book, and a novel of Sabine Baring-Gould's (*The Broom Squire* of 1896), the scene of which was laid in the neighbourhood, was being read by all the debilitated guests. I think it treated of the Murder. I was too debilitated to read either."

Mrs. Thomson, on the advice and through the kindly offices of Sir Lauder Brunton, was now taken to a "rest-cure" or sanatorium in the Surrey Hills, as the one chance of bringing her round to a normal state of health; wherefore in acknowledging the gift of a specially bound copy of *My Son and I*, by Mrs. Spielmann, for which he had drawn the illustrations, Hugh explained how much of it would please the invalid in her solitude, at the same time, while wishing to know how the book was "going", he declared himself positively frightened to ask, as "I always was a coward about such things, and never yet dared ask whether any book with which I was associated sold well or ill".

Among the miscellaneous illustrating done during this year (most of which was given up to sketching in the Home Counties for the *Highways and Byways* series) Thomson had the gratification of illustrating a paper which his son had written for the *Pall Mall Magazine* on "'The Ins and Outs of Varsity Life', by a Cambridge Fresher". After the last of the Surrey drawings had been done, about July, the artist concentrated on what he feared would be the "uninspiring" *Middlesex*, though after a few excursions he wrote ('tis twenty years since): "It has been a revelation to find Hendon, Enfield, Edmonton, Tottenham, all delightful places; the last two especially on the main thoroughfare showing a smiling aspect which would put some of these western suburbs to shame. So cheerful, so clean, so broad and so well looked after by their local authorities."

With the close of 1908 Hugh was able to announce to a friend that his wife was getting much stronger; but in January he himself appears to have had a fresh period of





**PROGRAMME**

Songs A. "Chanson de Mer" Paulin  
B. "Serenade" Jacome "Jaune"  
Mrs George Swinton.  
Vocal A. "Adagio Religioso" Mieuxlamps  
Soleo B. "Mazurka" Sieniewski.  
Songs M. "No. 1" Schumann.  
D. "Ungeheuer" Schubert.  
Vocal M. "Waltz" "Friedrich" Wagner  
Soleo B. "Abendlied" Schumann  
Songs M. "Das Jagdlied" Arensky  
D. "Romance (in Russian)" Lubinski  
Vocal A. "Glamorouske" Dvorak  
Soleo B. "Hungarian Dance" Nachez  
Songs A. "The Gentle Maiden" Old Irish  
B. "See where my love a maying goes"  
Miss George Swinton.  
with the Piano.  
Miss Kate Girdle  
Miss S. Little



**Programme of Band**

1. March Charlatan Sousa
2. Waltz "Kerchmähre Liebe" Linke
3. Marche "Musica Roubita" Gostalden
4. Selection "Välgar Fräime" Strauss
5. Barcarolle "Contes d'Hoffman" Offenbach
6. Marche "Soleil d'Amour" Elgar
7. Ballet Suite "Faust" Dvorak
8. "Garda" Brahms
9. "Garda" Nielsen
10. "Garda" Nielsen
11. "Garda" Nielsen
12. "Garda" Nielsen
13. "Garda" Nielsen
14. "Garda" Nielsen
15. "Garda" Nielsen
16. "Garda" Nielsen
17. "Garda" Nielsen
18. "Garda" Nielsen
19. "Garda" Nielsen
20. "Garda" Nielsen

**Male Lanes**  
**White Band**

depression attendant upon ill-health, but this time, at least, not very serious, for a note to him from Austin Dobson begins, "If you write thus delightfully 'in the blues', it must be the 'sky blues', for your letter is like electric champagne—if there be such a beverage!"

Soon Hugh Thomson showed that he had recovered his spirits in a letter announcing his intention of attending one of the big dinners of the Boz Club, and a few days later we find him dining with the Dobsons at Ealing. This in itself was esteemed a matter of importance—or was made so by Alban Dobson designing special menu cards on which were copied verses composed specially for the occasion by Austin Dobson. The poetical *pièce de resistance* was this:

#### TO HUGH THOMSON

A man in hew all Hews in his controwling.  
SHAKESPEARE, Sonnet XX.

In black and white we now and then  
Contrive, in some imperfect way,  
To hint the things we hope to say,—  
And sometimes with a hopeless pen!  
Expression is beyond our ken;  
We speak not as we should, but may,  
In black and white.

Not so with you, thrice blest of men!  
Your thoughts must be as clear as day;—  
You see the shapes that you portray,  
And make them move and live again  
In black and white.

Then on the reverse of the menu was this comical little verse, "On the ingenious Mr. H—GH TH—MS—N, in the manner of Mr. PRIOR":

There's one thing that I can't make out,  
Said Dick (who loves his pun),  
If Heu (in Latin) means a-lass!  
How is he then Tom's son?

The original copy of the menu in Austin Dobson's handwriting bears on its back this further quatrain:

*Heu pietas, heu, prisca fides.*—HORACE.

With strength we link Leonidas  
And valour with Alcides  
With Hugh 'tis always pietas  
Or else 'tis prisca fides.<sup>1</sup>

The finishing of the sketches for the Middlesex book occupied the artist during part of the first half of this year, and he was also busy over a new venture in the way of colour-work arranged for him through the firm of Ernest Brown & Phillips of the Leicester Galleries. Work on this kept him very busy, as it had to be completed in time for publishing in the autumn, and he was being "harried" for the concluding pictures by the end of June, which, after "working under great pressure", were completed before the end of July, when he was able to take his wife away for a month to North Wales. "We are a little less anxious than of yore", he wrote, in a spirit of happy relief, "but have to curb my wife's tendency to knock herself up. She does this once a fortnight, but is gradually recovering complete health."

Shortly before setting out for North Wales Hugh wrote to Mrs. Walter Jerrold, who was taking active part in the agitation in favour of Women's Suffrage: "I absolutely decline to wear a purple, green and white tie. Assured as I am by all the beauty specialists that hues (opportunity for W. J.) like these would diminish those personal attractions which constitute my sole claim to distinction, is it likely that I and the few other male creatures similarly gifted, could so stultify ourselves? Perish the votes."

Of the stay in North Wales Hugh wrote to a friend saying that he was principally occupied in dreaming over the land-

<sup>1</sup> These verses have since been printed in Mr. Alban Dobson's very attractive volume, *Austin Dobson, Some Notes* (Oxford University Press, 1928), and are here set forth with his permission.





LITTLE LOVE PASSED, LOOKING NEITHER TO THE RIGHT NOR TO THE LEFT,  
TO MEET THE KING'S PROCESSION

(“Christmas at the Court of King Jorum”)

*From “The Rainbow Book”, by Mrs. M. H. Spielmann, published by  
Chatto & Windus, 1909*

scape and the effects which passed over and in “futile longings  
to record them”.

We are in a farmhouse [he said], the front part having been fitted up cleanly and neatly to receive guests and this front part is partitioned off from the farmhouse proper. We have a little flower garden to look out on and over its low wall a rich lush valley of tiny farms and fields, these reminding me very much of the North of Ireland in size and colour. Beyond the Valley are high hills rising into three imposing mountain peaks one of which drops into the sea and is considered by the author of *Highways and Byways in North Wales* to be the most imposing thing of its kind in this island, short of the Western Highlands. And I can believe it. At any rate the intense pleasure which these hills have given me under every romantic aspect it is possible to conceive, will make delightful memories (and regretful longings) when cooped up for the winter in that dingy dreary West Kensington. . . . In our sitting room there is an old tall brass faced clock (I mention it because its tick sometimes disturbs my wife at night) which keeps excellent time but it has the most comical language possible. The lengthy hours are struck off—the first three and *sometimes* four in a terrific hurry, one two three four—then a long pause as if she was out of breath, and in taking a long one she breathes out five, another pause, and then the remaining hours are sedately ticked off just as any ordinary clock would do it. Sometimes the effect is too absurd, but it has given me an affection for the old thing almost as if she were a dear old maid who rushed off in a great hurry and had to pull up for want of breath. We also have funny little weather glasses with little women and men who come out and go in, not *before* the weather changes, but after. We tell them we are obliged to them for their belated information.

Before the end of September they were back at Perham Road, and in writing his thanks for a copy of *The Rainbow Book*, for one of the stories in which he had done a dozen drawings, Hugh said: "It is the first occasion on which I have rejoiced in getting back to the smoke and dirt of London. And our holiday was spent in one of the most delightful parts of Wales, with glorious views, and a lovely rocky coast. Incomprehensible. Perhaps the advent of second childhood."

## CHAPTER VII

SHAKESPEARE AND SHERIDAN AND BARRIE

TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL DAYS AND THE SCARLET LETTER

1910-1915



ANY of Thomson's drawings, as we have said, were specially tinted for exhibition, the artist finding in that tinting some slight expression of his delight in colour. As Austin Dobson had written in his appreciation of the work of the artist, "This was a plan adopted, with good effect, not only in a special edition of *Cranford*, but for some of his original drawings which came into the market after exhibition. Nothing," he declared, "can be more seductive than a Hugh Thomson pen-sketch, when delicately tinted in sky-blue, *rose du Barry*, and apple-green (the *vert-pomme* dear—as Gautier says—to the soft moderns)—a treatment which lends a subdued but indefinable distinction, as of old china with a pedigree", and fully justifies Austin Dobson's happy phrase, "the Charles Lamb of illustration".

It was doubtless the general appreciation shown of the delicately tinted drawings which appeared at various exhibitions that suggested the issuing of volumes the main feature of which was illustrations carried out in this manner; indeed, the success of *As You Like It* was such that for several successive seasons the Leicester Galleries arranged for a work or works to be illustrated by Hugh Thomson in this way. Thus in the course of the next few years he did mostly for the same

The Initial letter is from *Pride and Prejudice*.



publishers (Hodder & Stoughton)—except Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* (Heinemann, 1910)—Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (1911); Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1912); Dickens's *The Chimes* (1913)—a smaller book; Sir James Barrie's *Quality Street* (1913), and *Admirable Crichton* (1914); and Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*, the drawings for which were completed in 1915, but which remain to this day unpublished.

It was probably but a short time before starting on this succession of colour books that Hugh wrote an undated letter to Jerrold in the course of which he said that he was finding a lack of suitable books for his illustrating and was therefore worrying his friends for suggestions. He added: "I am also finding that my friends have more sense than to have buried themselves in the too often pompous productions of the period desired. *The School for Scandal*, a most fascinating suggestion, is ineligible, I am sorry to say, having been done quite recently by E. J. Sullivan. Should you ever come across any obscure but happily excellent novel of long ago (and I am afraid if excellent it would not be obscure, and if obscure it is not likely to be excellent) I trust you will hoard it up for me."

After a recuperating stay at Littlehampton Hugh wrote recommending that place to an invalid friend: "When there is gloom in town the sun shines brightly on the coast. It is remarkable how in getting back to town from these south coast places one runs into the murk shortly after leaving the downs behind one. It was so with us when we returned from Littlehampton the other week, and I used to notice it regularly when living at Seaford and running up to town for the day. The murkiness not being very oppressive, but still taking away that joyous lightness out of the atmosphere which is so valuable—at any rate to a temperament like mine. I would be a Sun Worshipper did some prophet arise to make it fashionable. I *am*, in strict secrecy between you and me."

His sun-worshipping instinct was perhaps responsible for

the way in which he toyed with a suggestion that his son should apply for a vacant post in India:

Bejewelled palaces, rich begums glittering with gems, moonstones, secret hoards of precious stones lying about waiting to be looted by our hopeful, and all the other quite prosaic possibilities whereby one may grow wealthy all at once quite dishonestly! Ah the gorgeous East! Is John man enough, buccaneer enough, to seize these glittering opportunities? I doubt it. There is a sort of unsatisfactory scrupulosity about him which quite unfits him for the part my imagination casts him in. He might in the poorest spirited way, be quite content with his legal emolument, and instead of returning like Clive and Warren Hastings a Nabob of the Nabobs, establishing his parents in the most affluent old age, and himself in the most princely, he is much more likely to retain and sustain a character for the most heedless poverty and reckless honesty. Imprudent improvident honesty. . . . It sounds a most fascinating and delightful opportunity, and were I a young man in his place and with his education I should jump at it. But then he has a steady, a more dignified character. I could never endure the office confinement.

When in the autumn Hugh's illustrated *Merry Wives of Windsor* was published one of the present writers sent him an appreciative letter which brought back a quick reply: "I want to thank you for that too flattering, cheering and prodigious word 'Triumph' which tickled the vanity of all of us when it was read out this morning. Alas! When I cycled over Hammersmith Bridge this afternoon the Thames was not on fire, as I had fondly hoped, and I begin to suspect that the 'triumph' is one of the kind-hearted encouraging fictions of him whom it is such a pleasure and pride to call friend." Soon after the volume was published the artist's colour-drawings to it, as well as others to *As You Like It* and to *Esmond*, were placed on exhibition at the Leicester Galleries.

Again the winter proved a bad one from the point of view of health. Hugh himself had had a long lingering attack of neuritis, and early in February, shortly after sending an invitation to some friends, he wrote to Walter Jerrold: "My last letter to you had scarcely left the house when I had to attend the deathbed of a friend, my wife fell ill, and now our son has smashed himself up and has just been operated





FALSTAFF, TO PISTOL AND NYM: "Go, bear thou this letter to  
Mistress Page; and thou this to Mistress Ford"

*From "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (Act I., scene iii.), by William Shakespeare  
(William Heinemann, 1910)*







on at a hospital". John, when playing lacrosse, had had a collision which had resulted in a complicated smash about the shoulder and collar-bone, which meant long hospital treatment. On the 1st of March Hugh wrote: "Now that the sun has appeared one cheers up, but it has been a nightmare of a winter to us. . . . Your crocuses and snowdrops will have, I suppose, peeped up long ere this, and delicious spring is at hand, but I am sadly behind with my work and shall not be able to spare a moment for the blackbird's song. Here's a grievance. But I have lots and will not pour them out on you." The work was the illustrating of *The School for Scandal*, and as the drawings were mostly in colour it was necessary that longer time should be left for the technical details of reproduction.

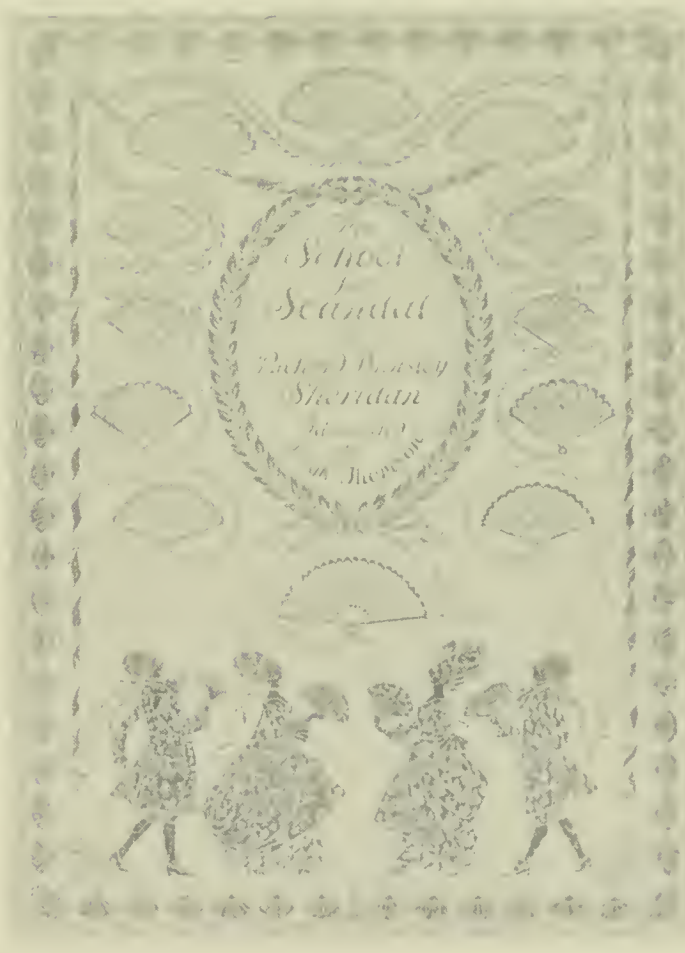
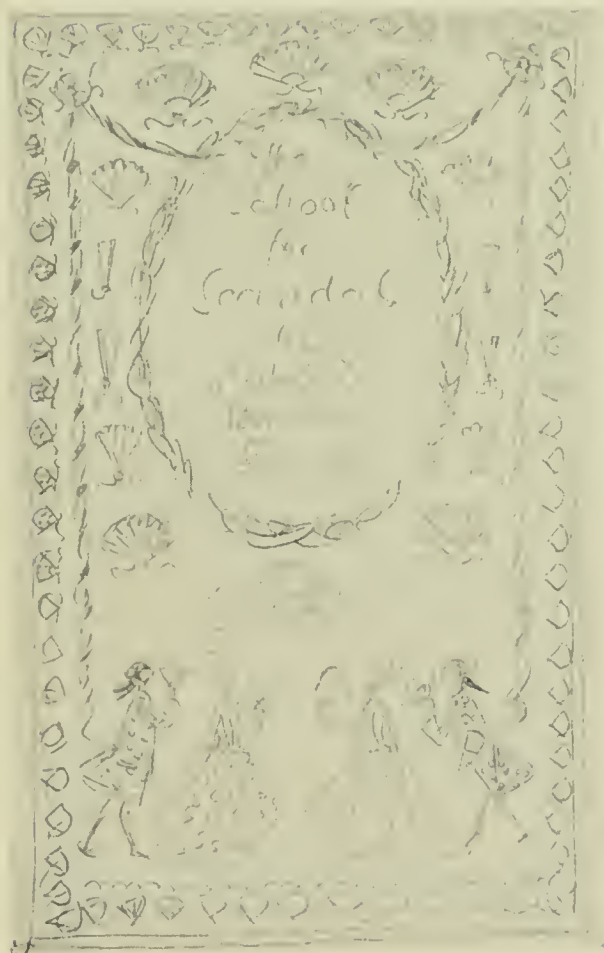
In the Thackeray Centenary Exhibition held at the Charterhouse in the summer of 1911 Hugh Thomson was represented by a couple of the illustrations he had made for *Esmond*, and by copies of the two of the novels which he had illustrated. In the summer, too, he received a pleasant gift from Austin Dobson in the form of Shakespeare's works with the richly imaginative illustrations by Sir John Gilbert, accompanied by characteristic and felicitous lines which, though they are included in Dobson's *Collected Poems*, we are here permitted by Mr. Alban Dobson to quote:

In Fifty-six, when Gilbert drew  
 These brave conceptions, people knew  
     Little that we today repeat  
     (Quoting the prophet in the street)  
 Of Value, Tone, and Point of View!  
 Their tastes were plain; their wants were few,  
 They liked red suns and skies of blue . . .  
     They were so frankly incomplete  
     In Fifty-six!  
 And yet they prized their Gilbert too—  
 His Knights and Dames, his ruffling crew,  
     Where banners fly, and drums are beat,  
     And cloth-of-gold and drugget meet. . . .  
 I was a lad then! Where were you  
     In Fifty-six?

Acknowledging the gift, Hugh admitted his appreciation of things in Gilbert's illustrations which had been quite unfelt by him in his young days when he first became acquainted with them—"Such delicacy and strength combined. The massive freedom of the drawings seems to me more in keeping with the plays than anything I know on the stage or off. Such pomp and circumstance as he can convey. To my mind he suggests the right atmosphere wherever required and with so little apparent effort. That glorious head of King Lear! All his Kings look as Kings ought to look but in King Lear he had to give more than that and I think he gives it in that study."

When the work on *The School for Scandal* was completed Hugh was commissioned to illustrate a new *Highways and Byways* volume dealing with the Border country. The book was to be written by Andrew Lang, but his illness and death, in the summer of 1912, delayed its completion, which was effected by his brother John, until 1913. It was, however, in the autumn of 1911 that the artist made his sketches, spending over a couple of months about the storied tract of country from Berwick to Carlisle, and, thanks to a season of drought, being able to work so continuously that he must have attained an average of nearly three drawings a day. When the volume was published there was included, at the artist's desire, a note pointing out that "his drawings were made during the long drought of 1911, when all the rivers were exceptionally low". This explanation he justifiably considered to be imperative. That he thoroughly enjoyed the work was shown when, in writing to a friend after his return, he said:

I had a glorious two months on the border, working and cycling with fury all the time. The old ballads, the rievvers, Border fights and Scott make an atmosphere which I found enchanting. It is, in a way, dangerous, because one sketches things, not because they are the most attractive pictorial subjects, but because they have literary or historical associations, and I doubt if this is the line to take in what should be, in a way, a picture book. In my anxiety to bag both kinds if possible, I was up and out before breakfast, and finished not the day till old Sol had



For the cover of *The School for Scandal*  
(Preliminary trial pencil-sketches and final composition, the fan and its flutter  
being in each case retained as the *motif*)



vanished. I should not like to tell you the number of sketches I made because you would accuse me of fiction. Many of them I rejected. But what a countryside, not a spot without a story.

Again and again when ill-health visited the household Hugh had wondered whether the Perham Road house did not lie too low, and had hankered after a country home rather than a town one, wherefore in the autumn of 1911 it was decided to move. A house was taken at Sidcup, as a compromise between the desired rural and the desirable urban, and when he returned, in October, from the North all had been duly effected. Writing shortly after they were in he said: "We are all much better for the change here although I, frankly, regret the dear old shabby shop in West Kensington, so warm, so convenient. Here I am cut off from all my old associates and to get to town needs a distinct effort. As for Hampton, it is a grief to think how far away it is. . . . We need a higher air. Here we are over two hundred feet up. This isn't a Norman Keep as the simple-minded cynic might suppose from the pompous address"—an address no less than—Normanhurst, Elm Road, Sidcup.

The publication of *The School for Scandal* brought forth a veritable chorus of praise, in which it was declared, in various ways, that the artist had matched Sheridan's brilliant dialogues with drawings not less brilliant. Yet complaint came from one source concerning a detail in one of the drawings, which is only worth noting for the artist's treatment of it. Writing to the Leicester Galleries, he said: "It was not ignorance which kept the lid of the sedan chair down. I have always been aware of the hinged top and can remember two published drawings of mine in which it is lifted,—one in *Cranford*, where the sedan chair is being aired, and another in Austin Dobson's poem, *The Old Sedan Chair*, where the lid is raised by the chairman to let the lady's high powdered head out without risk.<sup>1</sup> But the lid often was not raised, and was

<sup>1</sup> There are other such examples in his drawings, in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, and elsewhere.





Diggory to Mr. Hardcastle, who is drilling his awkward servants: "Then, ecod, your worship must not tell the story of ould grouse in the gun room: I can't help laughing at that—he! he! he!—for the soul of me. We have laughed at that these twenty years—ha! ha! ha!"

*From "She Stoops to Conquer" (Act II.), by Oliver Goldsmith,  
published by Hodder & Stoughton, 1912*

[This is a slightly reduced reproduction from the picture that appeared in colour  
in the volume]



often heavy and fixed, and my idea in the drawing criticised was that Lady Teazle, a very impulsive young woman, stooped and issued in one movement as soon as the chair was set down." Then, a few days later: "I beg to acknowledge your letter enclosing another from Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence. It seems a pity that he has not to work for his living, or at some occupation which would lift his mind off the worry which Lady Teazle's skip out of the sedan chair has caused him. At any rate I am not entering on any controversy with him. His references to me are, I suppose, meant to be offensive, and if I wrote to him, I should be tempted, possibly, to throw his epithets back, which would only be absurd. One would not get even an advt. out of it all as Jas. MacNeill used to." Later on, Hugh sent a reference to a contemporary print showing the closed lid of the sedan chair, but his critic remained firm, and the artist wrote: "It looks as though old 'Bacon wrote Shakespeare'<sup>1</sup> were unconquerable. So let it be. It was silly of me to reopen the business but I thought the contemporary print would scotch him. A rare old Johnny Bull."

The success of the Sheridan comedy seems to have led to a proposal that Thomson should illustrate Molière, for a note to the Leicester Galleries director runs: "Your Molière scheme fetches me tremendously, and nothing would delight me more than to do the comedies. You are a brick to have thought of me for them, and I am ever so much obliged to you. I have the vanity to feel that they would suit me down to the ground, and it will be a bit of a come down if the scheme comes to nothing." Unfortunately the scheme did come to nothing, and Molière lovers are vastly the losers.

Early in January there was a small dinner-party, which had been an annual affair for some time, instituted by Thomson's friend Herbert Baker. Six or eight friendly souls met at a Soho restaurant and started the year in pleasant companionship. When Baker had passed away it was proposed to main-

<sup>1</sup> Sir E. Durning-Lawrence, Bart., was desperately "Baconian".

tain the custom, and Thomson, when approached, replied in characteristic fashion: "I did not forget the d'Italie dinner, but as I heard nothing of it concluded that the last had been voted a bore and that the National Liberal group were not having another. Memories are short in these stirring times and poor old Baker may have been forgotten. But if you can get Elder and some of the others at the time you mention I should hail it with joy. There is a much more human atmosphere about such a gathering than some of those other big bow wow affairs with their dem'd evening clothes and solemn respectability. They make me feel I must *try* and be respectable too. So do get us together. I like that quiet Scotsman Elder very much, and Aaron Watson."<sup>1</sup> The dinner, which took place on January 5, 1912, was as usual a time of friendly merriment. It was also characteristic of Hugh that, having sketched one of the party on the back of his menu, and regarding the result as an unkind caricature, he allowed his neighbour to carry it off only under a pledge that the "victim" was never to know of its existence. His sensitiveness in this respect was such that, when asked later if he had not a caricature of a friend, he replied: "One is not always able to see for oneself where offence creeps in, and I would not for the world give cause for the shade of a shadow".

The comedy decided upon to follow *The School for Scandal* was Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, a work on which Hugh entered with great delight, and which formed the main work accomplished during the year, though in the spring came a proposal (also from Hodder & Stoughton) that he should illustrate Dickens's *The Chimes*. His reply was that he would much like to do it, but that he had never found himself able to carry on successfully two books at the same time, and being absorbed in *She Stoops to Conquer*, if he were to drop it and take up another piece of work it would mean waste of time while reading and "getting into" the new book,

<sup>1</sup> The prominent journalist and author, energetic and greatly liked, who died in 1926.

and further waste of time in picking up the thread of interest in the Goldsmith. It was therefore arranged that when the work on the comedy was completed Hugh would make the colour-drawings for Dickens's story, the publication of which was put off to the following year.

A letter of congratulation, written in the summer to Sir Edward Tyas Cook on the occasion of his knighthood, drew a reply of happy appreciation from that distinguished author-journalist:

Your very kind letter gives me great pleasure, and I thank you for it most warmly. What is nicest in the honour that has befallen me is the approbation which it receives from men like you—whose esteem, believe me, I greatly value. You must always be associated in my mind with some of the happiest days spent by my wife. She admired your talent enthusiastically and enjoyed the co-operation in *London* greatly. And I have two of your drawings hanging up in my country cottage, which perpetually remind me of happy days. Please forgive all this—but I could not help just indicating what peculiar and intimate pleasure your letter has given me.

Then in the autumn came a visit to Ireland, "in search", as Hugh put it, with a glance at the troubled period there, "of rifles, cannon, Covenants, etc.", and after that he crossed to Scotland, "sketching for M. M. & Co." (presumably finishing off the drawings for the Border volume). On his return he wrote—after but a year of his town-and-country compromise—"I did not come to Sidcup willingly, but circumstances and doctors' arguments were too strong and I had to leave my dear dingy dirty snug old den at Perham Road for this bright cheerful inconvenient God forsaken, cut off from - all - that - makes - life - happy domicile. Instead of 15 minutes to the National Gallery, it now takes the best part of 2 hours and I am gradually becoming more like a Brussels sprout than an Irish potato. However, we are all better in health and whilst you Riverside dwellers are bathed in luscious fog, we enjoy empyrean effulgence. So we laugh ha! ha! and I bite my nails and a desire for the pavements gnaws at my vitals victualled up to the walls though they be. . . ."



When *She Stoops to Conquer* was published, although his coloured drawings had been admirably reproduced, Hugh felt "most bitterly disappointed with the way in which the prints have been killed by the colouring and strength of the border framing them . . . such a colour in the border would kill even stronger tints than those in my work". (This, apparently, was quickly corrected.) That which distressed the sensitive artist was not noticed by the critics, and of course did not affect the quality of the artist's craftsmanship, which was acclaimed on all hands, one enthusiast declaring "it was clearly pre-ordained from the beginning of time that Goldsmith's comedy should be illustrated by Mr. Hugh Thomson"; and another that "in the whole of his career Hugh Thomson's art was never more advanced and developed than at the present time". To his friend Collins, who had hinted (in print) that Thomson had represented himself in the character of Diggory, he wrote: "As to your trying to get on my soft side by insinuating that I am not a better looking chap than old Dig I am left without words. Where is my genteel pallor? and you must be aware that I should scorn to have as much hair on top as has Diggory. No Sir, *I* am intellectually bald and genteelly colourless, whereas Dig is a mere healthy wholesome looking creature."

One of the most attractive and amusing of these drawings is that in which we see Miss Hardcastle tackling the shy hero Marlow with her disconcerting—"You were going to observe, Sir?" (Act III. Sc. 1). The fresh ease of the girl and the impotent embarrassment of the gallant youth, furiously searching for a fitting reply, are very happily imagined and unfailingly realised by the artist. This design—that is to say, the original drawing—was presented to H.M. Queen Mary by Lady (Leonard) Cohen, and was graciously accepted with much appreciation by Her Majesty, whose keen eye and unfailing taste are allied to a clear estimate of the work of the British School. The drawing was hung in the Queen's Norfolk home.



“TROTTY” VECK, WITH HIS DAUGHTER MEG, DINING ON THE STEPS

*From “The Chimes”, by Charles Dickens (Hodder & Stoughton, 1913)*







Shortly after *She Stoops to Conquer* was published Hugh had completed the postponed colour-drawings for *The Chimes*. This book was a squarish octavo with seven small but excellent colour-plates, among them one giving us Toby Veck with all his simple character and quiet humour amazingly depicted, touched-in entirely in the Dickens manner; and the whole encased in an admirably imagined cover, of the cheeriest



One of the several fly-leaf decorations to the successive acts of  
Sir James Barrie's *Quality Street*

design conceivable, calculated to fill the spectator with all the jollity and delight of the Christmas spirit only to look at it. Hugh had also begun work on his "big book" for the next autumn season before the close of the year, while in December the original drawings for *The School for Scandal* were on exhibition at the Leicester Galleries. The important commission for the autumn season after that was *Quality Street*, by J. M. Barrie, and in November the cover design and title-page were "under weigh". Early in December came a note from the eminent author to the artist asking him to lunch in order that they might "have a talk about the pictures", and



a few weeks later the first drawings were done. Sending them on to his intermediaries, Hugh wrote that he took it for granted that Barrie would "formally pass them even if they are not all he would like them to be. I don't see how an author ever *can* like illustrations of his work which must be so different to his own mental pictures." A surprise awaited him, however, for the drawings drew from Barrie a pleasant and a welcome tribute:

The pictures are quite delightful. I love to think such work is done for a play of mine, and am quite sure *Quality Street* could not have found such another illustrator in broad England. My criticism is that Phoebe as the schoolmistress looks too young. I like you the better for this, and am in the plot with you. So don't you go and alter. I hope you will soon be better. Phoebe and Susan ought to give you some of the nice things sent to Miss Livvy. "I am very happy of you", as they would say.

We see Sir James Barrie's liking for the drawings. And for the Man? After Hugh died one of the present writers was happy in receiving the delightful tribute that follows:

MY DEAR SPIELMANN,

I am glad to hear that you are writing a Memoir of Hugh Thomson. I have no contribution to send you of any value as I had, I think, only two glimpses of him personally, when he came to see me about his illustrations to two of my plays.

He was a man who drew affection at first sight, so unworldly, so diffident, you smiled over him and loved him as if he were one of his own delicious pictures. What the man was came out in his face and in all his modest attractive ways; it might be said of him that he was himself the best picture he ever made. His heart was the gentlest, the most humorous, and so was he. I delighted particularly in his pictures for "*Quality Street*", and it is the figures he created that I see in that street now, with himself walking among them, understanding them better than the people of to-day, perhaps understood better by them.

—Yours sincerely,

J. M. BARRIE.

All through this winter and spring Thomson was "very seedy—rottenner than I ever remember for such a length of time", so that the dainty work on the dainty comedy was done in trying circumstances, with the addition that for a time trouble with his eyes necessitated consulting an oculist,

who forbade him to use them. At the end of April he was greatly cheered by the gratifying news that, thanks to the kindly suggestion of Austin Dobson and his son Alban, John Thomson fitted himself to receive an appointment under the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. Writing to Mr. Alban Dobson in the following month Hugh gave his friend a taste of his higher spirits:

We are still trying to realise that John has got rid of the incubus of those horrible mathematical examinations and that all he has to devote himself to in future is improving the breed of fishes, making sprats into whales, and herrings taste like red mullet. Incidentally we are all becoming just a trifle nautical in our outlook and I have already anxiously enjoined on our fishery expert the advisability of his keeping a vigilant eye on *The German Peril*, in the offing, as he passes our Eastern Shores.—T.

In two or three of his letters, as we have seen, Hugh let it out that he was not altogether happy at Sidcup; he had not there been able to recapture the delight he had known at Seaford, and he felt a good deal of an outcast from his own world. Mrs. Thomson herself had observed that it was too lonely for him, "and as he hates the railway journey to town, and so goes very seldom, he is cut off almost entirely from museums, picture galleries and things like that that interest him. . . . But since he came here, he discovered, what he never suspected before, that he had really grown very fond of town—the streets with their hurrying crowds, the brightly lighted shops, the print shops, even the motor omnibuses, and he quite pines to be on a 'Tube' route."

He found of course, like others, an undoubted stimulus in London, even though at times he derided it and sighed for the country. And so in the summer of 1913 the resolve was taken to move closer in again, and on July 29 Hugh wrote from Sidcup that "we leave here tomorrow for 8 Patten Road, Wandsworth Common, S.W."

Of the new home he set it down a little later on, in obvious contentment, that it was "beside Wandsworth Common station where I can get to my beloved streets in ten minutes

or so. How I did pine for them when at that dreary Sidcup. We had a bright house in a delightful situation, but it took over an hour to get near Charing Cross and life. I can put up with the sea but the country, nevaire again!" Another attraction of the new home was that Hugh was within easy access of his old golf course at Wimbledon, where—when not away on sketching expeditions—he took his chief exercise.

At the time of the removal from Sidcup to Wandsworth Common Hugh was commissioned to undertake a further volume of the series with which he had come to be so familiarly associated. This was the *Highways and Byways in Northumbria*,<sup>1</sup> the author with whom he collaborated being P. Anderson Graham, so that he quickly was off north again. "I love the work", he wrote, "especially after the first 2 or 3 weeks, but those 2 or 3 weeks are dreadful. The getting into the swing of unaccustomed methods, the nightly disgust and discontent with the day's doings. It is a grind and no mistake. But afterwards, given fine weather and a good subject, it is delightful."

Shortly after Hugh's return home an exhibition of his colour-drawings to *Quality Street*, and some of those to *She Stoops to Conquer*, was opened at the Leicester Galleries, and at about the same time the *Quality Street* volume was published—to be received with general acclaim, which may be summed up in the sentence of one critic: "One is tempted to believe that the author of the play had the artist in view when he wrote it". The success of the artist as delineator of Sir James Barrie's play was such that a proposal was immediately made that for the next year he should illustrate *The Admirable Crichton*. The proposal delighted him because, in his opinion, the play is "one of the best things the dramatist has done, and that means one of the best things on the stage in this generation". This work formed the artist's main occupation during the spring and summer, though in the spring came an enquiry

<sup>1</sup> The volume was not published until 1920.



from an American firm as to whether he would consider a commission to illustrate *Tom Brown's School Days*; and in addition, a month later, he had the gratification of receiving a commission to do a further volume of the series on which



THE NITH ESTUARY FROM CARSETHORN

*"Highways and Byways in Galloway and Carrick",  
published by Macmillan & Co., 1916*

he always laboured with strenuous delight—*Highways and Byways in Galloway and Carrick*.

At the beginning of 1914 Hugh was welcomed into the small "Fireside Club" of a dozen members, that met periodically for a simple lunch or dinner and friendly "crack". His winning modesty and gift of friendliness, combined with the dual capacity for being a good talker and an interested listener made him an ideal "Firesider". As for a brief time this club loomed large in Hugh Thomson's social life, it is

well to say a few words about it here. The member who might be called the figurehead of it was Richard Whiteing, the eminent novelist—best remembered to-day, perhaps, although so many years have passed since it appeared, by *No. 5 John Street* (1899). To Hugh he was “our old nobleman”, as he wrote to Walter Jerrold three years later, and he rejoiced “to hear of the grand old man presiding again over the Firesiders, to whom my remembrances go”. A few years later, when Hugh passed away, Whiteing wrote about the club and about Hugh himself as follows:

DEAR MR. SPIELMANN—

You may like to know that I first made the acquaintance of Thomson at a club called *The Fireside*, and limited to a dozen members. It was wholly conversational. It might have been called the *No Nothing Club* barring good fellowship. There was no “subject” for discussion—that came merely by grace of God, no entrance fee, no annual subscription, no rules, no fixed abode. We settled our bill at the table, in a restaurant for choice.

It was, and is to-day, a success. When the cloth is drawn we gather round the hearthstone, give each other of our best, and when the time comes to part shake hands and look forward to the next monthly meeting. This was just the thing for Thomson, but alas! his attendances soon had to come to an end. We took care to keep him on the roll, as our mascot, nor did we fail when we learned the cause of his absence to send him a round robin with our love.

One such message lies before the present writer:—

December 1, 1917.

From the Fireside we all send friendliest greetings to Hugh Thomson—Richard Whiteing, C. E. Lawrence, A. St. John Adcock, Walter Jerrold, W. H. Helm, Keighley Snowden, Roger Ingpen, Frederick Watson”—

all, it will be seen, in the upper rank of journalism and letters. Reading it, who will say that the spirit of the Mermaid has wholly evaporated in these days? Hugh acknowledged the greeting, deeply regretting that he could “no longer be a Firesider except in the home sense.”

My impression of him [added Richard Whiteing, characteristically and analytically] was just this. Here is a man who must be, him-







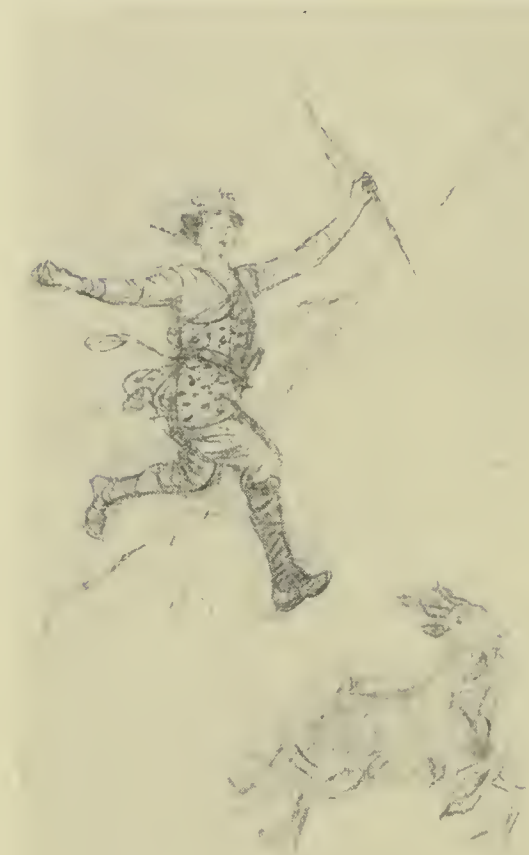
self, "the great sublime he draws"—sublime in this sense, sweetness of nature. Hence the work and the man in happy action and reaction on each other to the most beautiful results, each a key to the other or—to change the figure—both together a harmony of the gifts and attributes that go to the making of insight.—He was wholly without pretence or affectation, and in his frolic hour the most charming of good companions, with no self-consciousness to mar the effect.

Early in this year (1914) Hugh received from Judge Dodd some sonnets in which he had evidently expressed congenial aspirations and sentiments, for in acknowledgment the artist wrote: "We are all greatly delighted with the sonnets, and highly gratified that you should have sent us copies for our very own. Personally I long for even a measure of the strength of character and unselfishness of disposition which would enable one to live anywhere near the standard of the gospel preached in them. They have touched us very much, expressing as they do the yearnings which we feel have always influenced your life. 'Work and duty' and cheerfulness found in this, and in giving happiness to others, is a true summing up of your creed steadfastly carried out. That you are no flabby sentimentalist but can lose your temper and swear at one occasionally when necessary, only enhances the effect of your genuine selflessness. I don't know of anyone who so commands my earnest respect—I would say reverence, only that one is shy of using words like that."

Although during the first half of 1914 the illustrating of *The Admirable Crichton* was the artist's main occupation, he managed to work in one or two minor tasks including a page for the *Christmas Graphic*. It was possibly about this time that he designed a series of half a dozen covers for writing-pads. But the Barrie comedy was the chief personal event of the year, and when the book was published in the autumn it was welcomed as *Quality Street* had been welcomed, and was taken as further proof that "the Barrie-Thomson combination is as perfect in its way as was the Gilbert and Sullivan".

The summer of 1914 saw the beginning of the Great War,

when everybody was exhorted to carry on his lawful occupations under the slogan of "business as usual". How impossible it was to act on this behest, and what effect it must have had on a landscape artist was soon brought home to



Pencil-sketch made for one of the illustrations in *The Admirable Crichton*, by Sir J. M. Barrie, of Lady Mary Lasenby chasing the goat

Hugh Thomson. About mid-August he went north, armed with the necessary permits, to make his topographical sketches in Galloway and Carrick for the new *Highways and Byways* volume, and almost at once there occurred an "incident" which distressed him extremely. While sketching at the Old Bridge connecting Maxwelltown and Dumfries he was regarded at first with curiosity and then, suddenly, with suspicion; a meddlesome woman told him he had no right to be sketching in war-time; somebody else appears to have described him as a suspicious character to a local constable, and that

same constable insisted on the artist accompanying him to the police station. Followed by a considerable crowd, largely composed of children, and accompanied by cries of "German spy", Thomson went to the police office, where of course he immediately established his *bona fides*. The advice that he should return to his Dumfries hotel by a roundabout route he scorned to take, though he told the local reporter



(who managed to make a column out of the incident) that "the host of kids" which accompanied him to the police station was the worst behaved pack he had come across in Scotland, and he added that although he had always been under the impression that Scots were moved by common sense this experience had disabused him on the point.



THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP, GRETNA GREEN

*From "Highways and Byways in the Border", published by Macmillan & Co., 1913*

Writing six weeks later to his friend Mr. Arthur G. Gilbert (of Macmillans), Hugh said "the annoyance has continued ever since. I have several times been mobbed. . . . You have no idea how beastly it is with such hostility about. Suspicion everywhere and shouts of 'German Spy' the moment the sketch book is produced. At first I was inclined to throw it all up and go home, but somehow one's blood gets up, and I vowed that unless the police actually stopped me I would see the public far enough before I gave in to

their threats. Some of them say that if they had a gun they would shoot me. Fancy that. They are cracked, of course; the press is largely responsible. There are sensational rags up here in the North just as in the South, and the country people believe every word in print. I, of course, do my best to reassure them, but my accent, so obviously not English, and, as they know, not Scottish, makes them still more suspicious. I have been interviewed about a dozen times by the police, who are very courteous, and this Chief Constable has been at pains to telephone all over his County (Wigtownshire). So that now I have the police on my side, altho' I am sure I add greatly to their work." A few days later, writing from Stranraer to the same friend, Hugh said: "I want to make your flesh creep, and instead you are all enjoying it. I haven't had any dogs set on me lately, nor has any hooligan threatened to shoot me, because I think the excessive fright in the countryside is dying down somewhat owing to the more favourable turn in our affairs at the front."

Among the letters of introduction which Hugh took north with him was one to Sir Herbert Maxwell, Bart., who welcomed the artist to Monreith, and played golf with him at Stranraer. Though Sir Herbert had edited the set of Whyte-Melville's works, a story of which—*Inside the Bar* in *Riding Recollections*—Hugh Thomson had illustrated, they had not met before, and a pleasant friendship sprang up between them.

Despite all the unpleasantnesses attendant upon the work, the artist completed his sketches—"a lovely tour it would have been", he declared, "but for the spy-mania"—and returned home in late October or November. The war was already beginning to affect things in a way that made the cry of "business as usual" under which it had begun sound foolish indeed. Projects of all kinds began to be held up, postponed, or abandoned, and in 1915 the work-commissions for artists and others were either greatly modified or non-existent. Hugh had still in hand the illustrating of *Tom Brown's School Days* for America, but the only new commission he





CALEB PLUMMER AND HIS BLIND DAUGHTER

*From "The Cricket on the Hearth", by Charles Dickens (Chirp the Second)*

One of four designs drawn for Hodder & Stoughton, but not yet published







received was to make a few colour-drawings for Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth* as companion to *The Chimes*. Then at the beginning of the year he made a pleasant excursion into the drawing of certain eighteenth-century subjects in silhouette for Austin Dobson, who wrote enthusiastically about them, "I think these are quite wonderful, and they suggest all kinds of possibilities to me. I am taking two off to get frames and shall at the back put *A Caveat*. The Richardson is excellent too. A thousand thanks!"<sup>1</sup> With this note the poet sent the artist a copy of *A Caveat*, which was not published until the issue of *Austin Dobson: Some Notes by Alban Dobson* (1928):

This cleverly constructed "shade"  
Was by a skilful artist made—  
HUGH THOMSON, whose illustrious name  
Dwells in the megaphone of Fame.  
He based it on the profile true  
That honest WILLIAM HOGARTH drew,  
From mem'ry, 1762.  
Witness my hand and Seal thereto

Austin 

A. D.'s
"lyre"
seal

 Dobson

In the spring and summer of 1915 Hugh again suffered much in health, at first with influenza and later on with internal trouble at first attributed to indigestion. In April a pleasant invitation to golf from Sir Herbert Maxwell found him in bed. Two months later he wrote that he was hoping to be at a "Fireside" gathering, saying "My complaint (such horrid pains after food or drink) is more under control through careful dieting and I have been able to golf a little during the last few days". A month later, when we find him arranging a postponed dinner invitation with a friend engaged in volunteer drilling, Hugh broke out into words, for him unaccustomed, on politics:

<sup>1</sup> Extracts from these "essays in the Black Art" appeared in Austin Dobson's *A Bookman's Budget*, 1917. Other good examples of the silhouette executed by Hugh are in Mrs. Thomson's possession, notably that of Dr. Johnson, illustrated here on p. 198.

Tuesday week as soon as you can get off from parade I will write to Comrade (Keighley) Snowden in the hope that he also will be free. He has got an idea that I am an estimable character and eligible for the World Order of Socialists whereas the levity of Me is such that one day



A crowd of eager and curious schoolboys (before the scaffold in the market-place where Hester Prynne was to be set on public view)

Pencil study made for one of the illustrations in *The Scarlet Letter*,  
by Nathaniel Hawthorne

I cuss the Tories and all their works, and the next the hug-be-friends Socialist. Liberals seem to be the sanest of all. They do what they *must* (*must* it is) and *practically* to keep things moving, whereas we know that Socialists hate Liberals like poison, because this practical method handicaps the socialist dream of a convulsion which will bring in their



SCENE IN COUNTRY TOWN

This unfinished drawing apparently formed the basis for the frontispiece to  
*The Blinded Soldiers' and Sailors' Gift Book*, 1915





ideal instanter. Now their ideal is a noble one, but that our millions should stew in misery till their millenium comes along is to me a horrible stupidity. Accept the goods the gods, the Libs., yield us and ask for more. Now why did I embark on this screed?!! Messages of the most devoted character to your family.

Yet, strongly as he felt—especially about Ireland—Hugh did not wish it to be thought that he took himself very seriously as an active politician. As he wrote to a friend: “I hope you don’t take my vituperation on political matters as anything but Gas. I wouldn’t hurt anybody’s feelings or convictions (except Carson’s) for the world.”

Despite his repeated illness during the year Hugh completed the seven capital colour-drawings<sup>1</sup> for *The Cricket on the Hearth*, and then started his brilliant work illustrating Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (for Methuen’s), though publication of it was destined to be postponed, owing to war conditions, for several years—until 1920. In the autumn he paid a visit to Ireland in the hope that the holiday might restore his health, and there he received from Sir Herbert Maxwell (“still thirsting for vengeance” on the golf course) a cordial invitation: “I am grieved that your health has given you concern. You are now in the North of Ireland; may I remind you that the most direct route back to Wandsworth Common lies through Wigtownshire viâ Larne and Stranraer. It would give me sincere pleasure if you would take it, and in passing, pay me a visit at Monreith. I shall not bother you to play golf, or to take any exercise beyond your inclination. You can just make use of us as a convalescent home. I beg you to think favourably of this. . . . No stairs. I can lodge you on the ground floor—the *piano nobile*, as they modestly term it in Italy”—but this considerate invitation Hugh did not feel able to accept.

These recurrent illnesses, which earlier in the year had been attributed to indigestion, now compelled him to see a specialist, when he learned that his trouble was angina

<sup>1</sup> These remain as yet unpublished.

pectoris, necessitating of course the greatest care. It was then that he wrote to Walter Jerrold explaining, whimsically and sadly, that his Fireside Club delights had been cut short by "the fair Angina, a hussy not deserving of her charming name, who has done for me as a Firesider". He was back at Patten Road early in October, and henceforward he had to consider himself an invalid, barred from many of the things in which he had earlier rejoiced, though still capable of carrying



QUEENSTOWN CATHEDRAL

*Pencil drawing from "The Famous Cities of Ireland", by Stephen Gwynn.  
Maunsell & Co. and The Macmillan Company, New York, 1915*

on at his delightful art—hand and eye and fancy not seriously affected by the recurrent heart attacks which again and again laid him up.

The Christmas season of 1915 saw no Hugh Thomson book; the deepening of the war shadow required postponement of work accomplished, and the only book illustrated by him was one for which he had done the drawings nine years earlier, Mr. Stephen Gwynn's *Famous Cities of Ireland*; he contributed a drawing called "The Blinded Soldier", used as the frontispiece to *The Blinded Soldiers' and Sailors' Gift*





Hester Prynne, standing on the pillory-scaffold, recalls "her own face, glowing with girlish beauty, and *illuminating all the interior of the dusky mirror* in which she had been wont to gaze at it".

*From the original drawing for "The Scarlet Letter", by Nathaniel Hawthorne  
(Methuen & Co., 1920)*

With the permission of Lady Croft, owner of the drawing







*Book*—the first of many charitable publications of the war years to which he contributed with ever-cheerful readiness, welcoming the opportunity of doing anything that might seem to be helpful. Again and again he deplored being “a helpless old crock” at such a time, yet requests for drawing, whether for publications or as “donations” to bazaars or sales, in the case of war charities met with ready response.



MENU-CARD AND PROGRAMME FOR THE TITMARSH CLUB 1909

Hugh was happy in these varied menu designs which he drew for this Club of Thackeray-lovers—not alone this for the Sixth dinner, but others for the Fourth (March 27, 1908), the Ninth (November 3, 1910), the Twelfth (March 28, 1912), and the Fifteenth (November 4, 1913). The War broke the sequence of these notable biannual meetings and they were resumed only in November 1918. Hugh's fellow-contributors were C. E. Brock, Arthur Rackham, and Edmund Dulac. He was an original member of the Club, which was founded in 1906, and which still flourishes. The Boz Club, having accomplished its mission, has been brought to a close, its objects being in the hands of the Dickens Fellowship.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WAR YEARS—THE END

1916-1920



IN the early part of 1916 Hugh Thomson was able to complete the drawings to *Tom Brown's School Days* which had been commissioned by Messrs. Ginn & Co., of Boston, nearly two years before. Those publishers had been so struck by the artist's "naughty boy drawing" in *Quality Street* that, in asking if he would undertake the illustrating of the famous school story, they expressed willingness to hold back an edition of it which they were preparing that they might use his pictures. For the first three months of the year the artist had been so ill that for the greater part of that time he "had scarcely been over the door step". In the spring, however, he got to Rugby to complete the numerous sketches that called especially for local colour and actuality. In acknowledging receipt of these noteworthy drawings, a member of the firm wrote, in July, that all who had seen them were delighted. But nearly two years were to elapse before the volume was published.

Hugh had written to a friend on the subject at that time dominating all minds: "I would have given your message to John, but he has been on active service in France for some time. . . . He got leave to go last autumn, but (much to his disgust, as he had imagined himself highly trained) he had to undergo a considerable amount of training and examina-

The Initial letter is from *A Kentucky Cardinal and Aftermath*.



tions, but he got away much sooner than any of the others with whom he joined. He left us as if for a holiday. And it is not as if he did not know what to expect. Nearly every young Dublin acquaintance has been killed, and also many of his school and College friends. I can't help it having tried me very much, and what with feeling physically seedy the winter has been very blue, but all is as nothing to what my poor wife



RICHARDSON READING TO HIS "MUSES AND GRACES"

*A fancy silhouette from "A Bookman's Budget", by Austin Dobson, published by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1917*

feels. But enough. . . ." The Easter week trouble in Ireland, the sayings and doings of politicians and the journalists in regard to the war—"The Allies ever victoriously retiring somewhere or other! but always practically improving themselves in the process!"—these things he declared made him work himself into a fury, while his own disability to do anything was a constant worry.

In July came a severe attack of his ailment from which it seemed little likely that he would recover. He pulled through, however, but it left him a legacy of such constantly

recurring pain that, two years later, he wrote that only then, for the first time, had he been free of suffering for two successive days. Three months after the attack, in thanking Austin Dobson for a letter enclosing a draft of the poem



DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

Austin Dobson, in *A Bookman's Budget*, warmly lauded Hugh's experiments in silhouette drawing—especially those of Richardson, of Henry Fielding, and of Hogarth. This of the Doctor, referred to on page 191 *supra*, equals the best of them in character and life.

which later stood as Prologue to *A Bookman's Budget*, Hugh gave his assurance that that letter and poem had “acted like a tonic, and I have had one of my best days today, which is not merely a coincidence but the result of your charming sympathy”. He had had, indeed, a bad time of weakness and was only beginning to get hold of himself again: “It is up and down, up and down, but I am most certainly taking a step forwards each week, so fewer of these potent drugs are necessary to keep down the spasms”. On the same day (October 3, 1916) he wrote to Walter Jerrold: “I am not allowed to lift more than a light 8vo book, and have to get auxiliaries to open or shut windows, etc., etc. But I shuffle to and fro, and have my days of hopefulness,—not of recovery

complete—but of being able to open and shut a window for myself. However, this is a long tale about the fair Angina.” Thus lightly would he jest at his affliction.

Before the close of the year there came a sad family loss that touched Hugh deeply—the death of Mrs. Dodd, the Cousin Ellen who had meant so much to him from childhood

onwards; how much is, perhaps, best shown in the tender, touching letter (December 9, 1916) which he wrote to Judge Dodd on his bereavement:

In face of this terrible sorrow which has fallen on you and as one knows that words cannot comfort, I do not write to condole with you so much as to comfort myself by just talking about her—her kindness, her never-failing goodness and thought for all of us. In my childhood, when she was a beautiful girl, her kindness and sweet understanding were as active as they have been all through her life. When I was sick with shyness and timidity she never failed with her dear smile to put me at my ease, and I knew with a child's intuition how safe I was with her, that she would never, through levity or carelessness, wound the sensitive vanity which tortured all my young days and which, inevitably, was so often jeered at and cut by others not so instinctively kind as she. Who ever heard her utter a word which could hurt or cut?

And later, when there was every excuse in the crowd of new interests which sprang up round you and her in Dublin, she never lost sight of us. . . . Such generous actions as these one can only feel in the very depths of one's being. How good you both were. And when she thought for me again, and urged me to make the effort to strike out in London, helping me with introductions and every encouragement she could think of! Was there ever such a kind kind creature. She was that something, so much nearer to one's heart than an angel, a warm-hearted generous impulsive loving woman. When I last saw her a month or two back she cheered and stimulated me, and with that same sweet smiling expression which I so loved as a child. And now I shall never see it again. Although it was only occasionally I saw her of late years yet it was enough that she was alive and happy, surrounded by the cheerful society of those who loved her as you and your children did. Many hearts, not connected with her by family ties, will grieve that that dear woman has gone. . . . And you gave her cause for such pride in you, pride in your career, and in you as a man as I knew from her own lips.

Within a week yet another grief came as a shock to Hugh—the unexpected death of Comyns Carr. He wrote off at once to the sorrowing widow:

I cannot tell you with what sorrow I have just learned from the newspaper of the death of my dear old Chief. Nothing had prepared me for this, as the last news we had of him told us that he was moving about, and, as we understood, happily at work. Although I have not had opportunities of seeing him of late years, owing partly to my break-



down in health, yet this does not make his loss any less of a blank. He was associated in my mind with the happiest time of my life, which happiness was very largely owing to him. I recall all I owe to him, all the kindness and consideration which he showed when I was working under him, the never-failing encouragement and support, and the stimulus with which he helped me over many a period of doubt and discouragement. I am glad to think he knew I was conscious of all this, and of my gratitude to him. I was only one of many whom he encouraged and helped to do what was in them as best they could and that is only saying that I am but one of many who will always hold his memory in affectionate and grateful recollection.

I have not said anything of my sense of *your* loss. It is over thirty years since I first saw you and him together when you joined in being kind to the lonely fellow up from the country, and nobody realises more keenly than I do, what it must be to you to lose that companion. You must know, dear Mrs. Carr, how deeply I feel with you in your sorrow, and cannot help having a share in it.

Jessie joins me in the keenest sympathy.

It had indeed been a sad year for Hugh Thomson; to the constant worries and anxieties connected with the war, which he felt to the full, and the sundering of old ties was added the illness which gave him no better prospect than that of constant invalidism. Then, too, came the domestic anxieties consequent upon the falling away of work—a tragedy of the war that was perhaps more pronounced among the professional classes than in any other section of the community. Writing to a friend in 1916 he had said: “If the war continues much longer, and all the signs point to it, heaven only knows what will become of us poor pens and pencils”. By 1917 the problem was becoming a serious one to Hugh Thomson, for though he began with a couple of drawings for the jubilee number of the *Chatterbox*—that periodical in the pages of which many have made their earliest excursions into the wonderland of reading—and in the spring of 1917 had a page to prepare for the Christmas number of the *Sphere*, there was no illustrating work in hand, and little prospect of any until the shadow of the war had lifted. The consequence of this and his illness was that such savings as had been put by gradually diminished. He sought, in vain, for any work



DAVID COPPERFIELD AND THE WAITER AT THE YARMOUTH INN

"I'll drink it if you like. I'm used to it"

"A twinkling-eyed, pimple-faced man . . . holding up the glass to the light"

Drawn for *Chatterbox*, 1917

[This is a slightly reduced reproduction from the picture in colour that appeared in the volume]





for which he was fitted that would bring in a wage sufficient for his and his wife's modest requirements. When things were thus at the worst he may have derived some slight comfort and encouragement from an appreciation of his work which appeared in *The Studio* in April 1917: "Hugh Thomson, Illustrator", by Miss M. Hepworth Dixon.

Towards the end of May he confided to the present writer



WHEN HARRY LAUDER ENTERTAINED THE TROOPS DURING THE WAR. 1917

that he was nearing the end of his resources and asked advice as to where he should apply with the likelihood of obtaining even temporary employment. As he said:

I must get something to do, but what or where to apply is not known to me. I am unfortunately not fit for the National Service scheme which requires one to be more or less physically strong. About two years ago, a specialist whom I consulted about what I imagined was acute indigestion, pronounced it heart disease, and this was left in no doubt last July when an attack of Angina Pectoris nearly carried me off. Since then

no day passes without pain, which however can be relieved almost at once by trinitrin. I bore you with all this about my ailment in order to explain, that, whilst able to work at my desk for hours I am unable to lift things or to walk except at a snail's pace. But if I could get a sedentary job, some situation where I could carry on work (not necessarily art or illustration) at a bench or desk it would be a godsend. Could you recommend me for anything of that kind?"

Though modest in his wishes and in his estimate of his capacity for any work that might offer, Hugh Thomson had a quick pride which made it a little difficult to help him through his art; the wish to acquire one of his drawings was met with a return of the cheque and a request that the picture should be accepted as a gift! To the suggestion that an exhibition of his work, even at such a time, would result in some helpful sales he replied:

I should, I confess, shrink from any exhibition. At the best of times the publicity gave me painful sensations, and now the result would be the letting down of many kind clients who have previously paid high sums. I think I owe some consideration to them although they are unknown personally to me with the exception of yourself, and one other who, at various times, has bought great numbers, up to and above 50, I believe.<sup>1</sup> This client started buying when the tinted Jane Austen's were exhibited some 20 years ago. It makes me ashamed to think of it. Another consideration, I have no drawings left of any worth, excepting a number in the custody of the Leicester Galleries. They have the right of exhibition and demand the 25% no matter where or how sold, as is right and proper. 50% has come off before now under these circumstances. After they exhibit they revert to me wholly. My only hope and desire is in work. How happy I should be if I could be placed as you placed some one in Kingsway. But here I should repeat again that I know well, that there are no fat jobs going, and my expectations are of the humblest kind. I shall be thankful for what I can get . . . please don't think me unpractical, unbusinesslike or over sensitive. I am not really. I sometimes in business dealings have got quite waxy when I have thought some advantage was being taken of me, and I really am sensible that business people can't be philanthropic and yet remain in

<sup>1</sup> This doubtless refers to the late Mrs. Croft (widow of Lieutenant R. B. Croft, J.P., D.L., and mother of General Sir Henry Page Croft, Bart., C.M.G., M.P.), who was the happy owner of over eighty Hugh Thomson drawings. These were hung together in one panelled room at Fanhams Hall, Ware; and when she died they were distributed amongst the members of her large family.

business. Life is not like the Arabian nights except when good genii like you are about, and really your sending that cheque for £25 is more like something from the *Arabian Nights* than from a man who forsooth chides *me* for being unpractical and unbusinesslike. . . . *P.S.* The drawing is in the original mount and frame and is being packed. It looks so much better under glass that I wish you to have it so.

Though seeking any job that would bring in a bare sufficiency for him and his wife to live on in the time of stress Hugh Thomson, in such intervals as health permitted, kept on drawing "not on any commission, but just to avoid idleness. I have taken up a series of plays and mean to go pretty steadily through, making drawings to illustrate passages, and am much interested at present (June 4) being in better spirits." An alternative suggestion led to a pleasant and interesting expression of Thomson's views on some of the big artists:

You ask me why don't I etch? I should love to, but have always understood that it was a very difficult art. It is not merely the tracing of the lines on the copper, of which I believe myself capable, but the skilful preparation and biting and printing of the plates. In addition I don't believe I quite grasp wherein the excellences of etchings lie. For instance, why is Whistler put in the same street with Rembrandt? There does not seem to me to be the slightest question as to which is the master, but in most writing on the subject which has come in my way the modern man is placed a slight tilt above the grand old fellow whose range of power and *sincerity* (specially the last) seem overwhelmingly greater. But the explanation probably lies partly in a kind of hypnotism and partly in the poetic meanings read into works which to grosser minds seem casual, facile, and at times even ill-drawn. I think Whistler had exquisite taste and I also think that he was perfect in such oil paintings as that quiet beauty a long perspective of Old Battersea Bridge (rather a big painting) quiet russet and umber grey tones. So sincere, so thorough. Possibly he did lots of things like this, but to compare him to Velazquez in painting or Rembrandt in etching is beyond my understanding. Now on the other hand it is said by some that Ruskin read a great deal of his own imagination into Turner's things. That may be, and I have no doubt is so, but what a lot is left for all of us to read into Turner's things. I never go into the National Gallery but I feast my eyes on those colours which gleam like jewels and make the oils look so bourgeois, those in the neighbourhood anyway. I know that these water colours are facile too, but then it is the facility of a master. But where am I maundering to. Please excuse me, I



started to explain why I have shied, in the past, at etching but I should dearly like to have a try at it, and if Sir Frank Short would see me and tell me where to go to get a few lessons I should be infinitely gratified and obliged.

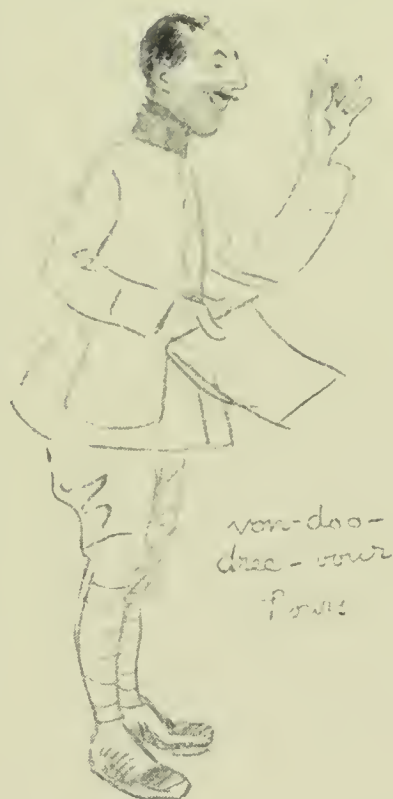
*He* is an exquisite artist, and apparently ranges with the greatest ease from fairy impressions like the Solway and Evening Star to rich dark grand aquatint and mezzotint. I love to look on these things. And I should love to try etching even if I never made a penny out of it. I am sadly afraid, my dear Spielmann, you will think I am one of those people always yearning to do things but not gifted with the grit *to go and do them*. There is a good deal in this, but I know now, what I never thought of previously except as lassitude, that this pumping muscle of mine was never up to much. So don't think badly of me if I have made rather a hash of what might have been a more strenuous working life. . . .

The result of it all was that by the end of June Hugh Thomson found himself placed in one of the departments of the *Commission Internationale de Ravitaillement* (in the Board of Trade), one of the many organisations which had sprung into existence in connection with the War. "Every one has conspired to make things easy and pleasant for me," he wrote a few days after beginning his regular work at India House, Kingsway. Though, as he put it, his heart made it necessary that he should walk at a snail's pace, he found at first that the steady work had a good effect on him, and he was "interested in seeing the streets day by day". At the end of a month or two in a department of the office in which "hustle" work appears to have been essential, Hugh was transferred to another section better suited to a man of his physical disability. Though he averred that neither his capacity nor his strength was likely to allow of his long continuance at office work, he remained there until after the Armistice, resigning in the beginning of 1919, "when I felt it very improper that I should cling on like a barnacle when the work on the Commission was shrinking and other and far more capable workers leaving".

Here, as elsewhere, the irresistible friendliness of his disposition charmed all with whom he was associated, and he himself was delighted with the kindly consideration of his

colleagues. "I am happy to say that I came away on the best of terms", he wrote. "Nothing could be more considerate than the treatment which I received when there. Mr. [A. G.] Chuter especially did everything he could to make my engagement happy and comfortable and Mr. [O. Pelly] Dick also. I owe them both the liveliest gratitude." Many of his letters written during his office period betray an almost morbidly nervous feeling of his own inadequacy, and the notion that anybody else might be doing the work better. Many people in those years of stress were engaged in tasks that gave them the feeling of being square pegs thrust by the fortune of war into round holes—few can have been tortured by that feeling to the extent that Thomson allowed himself to be. As Austin Dobson wrote in comment on one of Hugh's self-depreciatory whimsicalities: "As to not doing what you have to do well enough, I absolutely decline to believe that. But the world is full of 'trompettes' and it is your signal distinction that you are really modest."

During his stay at the Commission—the "C.I.R."—Hugh had had spells of illness, and it was only the indomitable spirit that kept him going for so long in conditions that must have made the daily journeys something like torture—with the long waits, and struggles to secure a seat in the omnibuses. About the time that he began his work there the first steps were taken to bring before the Prime Minister—Mr. Lloyd George—the position of the artist, whose prolonged spells of illness, culminating as they had done, and the cessation of professional commissions consequent on the War had so diminished his resources that he



A memory sketch of a foreign military caller at the C.I.R.

was likely to be reduced to dire straits. The method adopted in this instance was a direct memorial to the Prime Minister, signed by a small group of men, the memorialists setting forth that "a fine independence and a horror of charity disincline Mr. Hugh Thomson absolutely from accepting help from friends, or from Benevolent Funds which would deprive others; nor could he bring himself to make an appeal for help such as would shock his self-respect. For this reason,



A memory caricature of well-known figures  
at the C.I.R.

a few only among the multitude who appreciate the brilliant quality of his work and would recognise his indisputable claim on public grounds, have ventured—out of respect for his extreme sensitiveness and modesty—to make this appeal in a rather unusual form, in the hope and belief that his case will not thereby be prejudiced." The signatories to this memorial—each one of whom was selected by reason of his special official authority, his po-

litical position, or place in the art world—were the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, Lord Plymouth, Sir E. J. Poynter, Sir Herbert Samuel, Sir Herbert Maxwell, Sir Frederick Macmillan, Mr. John Burns, and Mr. M. H. Spielmann. High tributes to Hugh Thomson's personal character and to his art accompanied the memorial in the form of letters from the persons named, among them being Lord Plymouth's emphatic statement that "I can imagine no case in which a Civil List pension would be more properly and rightly bestowed than in that of Mr. Hugh Thomson. The life of



an artist who thinks only of his art and is satisfied with nothing but his best can never be an easy one. It is the result of those high qualities which Hugh Thomson possesses and through which he has permanently enriched the work of illustration in England. This surely deserves recognition from the country."

Despite the unusual method of appeal it met with a favourable response, and in May 1918 Hugh Thomson was notified that he had been granted a Civil List pension of £75.

In October 1917 had come a commission from [the late] Sir Isidore Spielmann to design a cartoon to accompany his pungent "Open Letter to Herr Maximilian Harden", *The Germans as Others See Them* (August 1917), to be followed a year later, when the predictions therein contained were on their way to being fulfilled, by *Germany's Impending Doom* (1918)—and this, the first of a series of four which Hugh produced, had qualities of directness, combined with enthusiasm and effective draughtsmanship, which suggest that it was a pity that Hugh Thomson's pencil had not earlier been directly and regularly employed in connection with official "War propaganda". These pamphlets, indeed, were officially adopted and many thousands were circulated by the authorities in both Spain and Portugal (in their proper languages), where it was considered they would be of use in meeting the propaganda of the enemy. Hugh's work in this kind, however, was limited to the four cartoons commissioned by the above-named patriotically impelled individual, and it had to be done at the only time when the artist was free—that is, on Sundays. On weekdays, as he wrote, he had to leave home before eight, and only got back again "just before the booming of the guns announces the coming of the raiders".

"There is nothing in his work," wrote Austin Dobson in *De Libris* (in 1908) "of elemental strife . . . of passion torn to tatters. He leads us by no *terribile via* . . . your flesh has never been made to creep." But ten years later Hugh

proved for once — as we see — that when fired by hot patriotic emotion his anger could burst into sardonic flame. The subjects were, indeed, suggested to him; but his is the credit of this now rather painful illustration of resentful satire.

In the autumn there came a proposal that Hugh Thomson should accept a commission at the hands of several admirers of his work to illustrate fully some book. He hailed the commission with “most heartfelt thanks” and went the length of discussing the possible work to be chosen for illustrating; then, however, he became compunctious as to giving up the work he had taken on merely because something more attractive offered:

I do not know how you think I ought to act in regard to my job here. You would probably say that that is entirely a matter for myself to decide, and I will state what my feelings are in regard to the matter. I think I should feel as if I were shirking, were I to throw up the moment an opportunity occurs to escape what, after all, are only the discomforts and inconveniences from which many delicate women and men suffer without complaint. I am of no value here, but yet paradoxically I should feel I was ungrateful to Mr. Chuter and Mr. Dick in “giving notice” all of a sudden just because kind friends had provided a more remunerative and comfortable job for me. So far, beyond a wretched cold which I had last week and the fact that the struggles in ’bus and train to get home or to work occasion a more liberal use of my remedies, there has been nothing to justify me in relinquishing my job here. I am certain it would be a saving to the office if I went but yet I don’t like to snatch at comfortable conditions of work till made so sufficiently wretched by physical conditions that I have no choice.

The friendly commission was for some reason abandoned, but it is interesting to know that among the works considered as possible for the purpose in view were Borrow’s *Lavengro*, Mrs. Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*, Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*, a selection from Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, Thackeray’s *Pendennis* and *Barry Lyndon*, Trollope’s *Barchester Towers*, and Lamb’s *Essays of Elia*, the last being curiously rejected by Hugh on the grounds of “having already been done many times” — possibly he had particularly in mind the dainty illustrating of *Elia* by Mr. C. E. Brock,

the younger, the very able artist who was most closely following in his steps. Yet a further suggestion was that one of Thomas Hardy's novels should be selected, and Hugh said that if he could have the illustrating of one of them, or of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *The Trumpet Major*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, or *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, he would be perfectly happy, and could ask nothing better or more congenial.

The letters which a man receives may be said to be sometimes as strongly characteristic of him as the letters he writes—for which reason we quote the following received by Hugh at Christmas from his old friend Judge Dodd:

MY DEAR HUGH,—Edith, who takes a maternal care of me, took me out for a game of golf at Foxrock. My man, I suppose, thought I could play it with my feet. At any rate he sent me off without my clubs. Under this strain it was obvious that there was nothing but literature to soothe the temper. And the bookstall offered *The Sphere*. And the muffin man<sup>1</sup> bade me be of good cheer, and I was comforted. I rejoice that your hand has not forgotten its cunning. I think it one of your best. I am ashamed to say I cannot do what the Editor says any schoolboy could do, place the spot in London you selected. Russell Square way or Gordon Square way are the only parts of the type with which I am familiar.

There are some presents I have got to make, early in the year, wedding presents forsooth. Could you out of that store of pictures you were making up for Jessie when you are gone, spare one or two now? Some of my friends in Belfast, where I was on circuit, asked me if I knew where some of your pictures could be had. I thought of sending them to you direct. But then I remembered your want of business temperament. Some in Dublin also would like them. What would you think of sending some over to Helen. She has a fine room in her Library! with fine old furniture supplied by Hicks for exhibition. As soon, however, as a customer offers her the price Hicks has fixed, Hicks says the article looks so well there, he will not sell it. Would that be your rôle also?

Fact is, old man, I hunger for a letter from you. I resolutely set myself against that heretofore. For there is so much of the artist in you, you must put your artistry into a letter, even to an old friend. I shrank from giving you trouble. I would add, a line will be enough, but you are not for that. Line upon line is your motto.

<sup>1</sup> The Christmas number of *The Sphere*, 1917: "The Muffin Man", with verses by A. J.



I send you heartfelt greetings. Courage and endurance are our portion. But with them we cannot be all unhappy. So with a sincere heart I wish you a happy Christmas.—Yours ever, W. H. DODD.

Early in 1918 Hugh was busy over the further cartoons for Sir Isidore Spielmann, so far as his limited time allowed, and expresses his pleasure at learning that the first of Sir Isidore's pamphlets "has taken on so with the authorities, nothing could be more gratifying than its translation into different languages and it must cheer him inexpressibly in his comparatively helpless physical condition". In the early months of the year there came another heart attack and a spell of influenza that kept him worrying over his absence from the office, and unusually depressed over the war news. Of the office he wrote: "Nowadays I have plenty of work to occupy me fully through the day, and am consequently as contented as can be, the only source of disquietude and, heaven knows, it is serious enough, being the course the war has taken. I wake up at times with my heart like lead, and was especially miserable whilst laid up." He was cheered when he learned that a copy of his *Cranford*, for which he had made a special drawing and which Messrs. Sangorski and Sutcliffe had specially bound, was sold for £100—at a single bid—to Mr. Hulton at the great sale in aid of the Red Cross; but he was abashed, as might have been expected of him, when he found that all the credit and renown had been generally awarded to him instead of also to Lady Ritchie, who had written a letter to be bound in, and not less to the patriotic bookbinder, Mr. Sutcliffe.

In the middle of May there came the gratifying news that the Civil List Pension which had been granted would start retrospectively from April of the preceding year, and the artist's delight in this public recognition, as expressed in his letters at the time, is touching. To the initiator of the movement he wrote: "How can I thank you . . . for this beautiful dream that has come true? I don't properly realise it yet, except for the exquisite relief which I experience, and the great pride that I



Memory sketches of a visitor to the Commission Internationale de Ravitaillement—illustrative of the artist's characteristic efforts to obtain the accuracy that would satisfy him.

have in it as a testimony of the friendship which you have for me. You would be pleased if you knew the load you have lifted off my wife's heart, the very material help which such a sum gives to people in our circumstances, especially to the

housewife.” “It is still like a dream. But what a jolly dream”, he wrote a little later.

In June Hugh had completed a year of work at the C.I.R. and was naïvely delighted at finding that a fortnight's holiday was due to him. He and his wife spent it at Littlehampton, where he completed a further cartoon for the second War pamphlet, *Germany's Impending Doom*. While there he proudly reported he had been “able to walk, of course at a very slow pace, nearly one and a half miles without pain or need of the drug. It is when I forget and quicken up a little that the warning signal flares up, but luckily the remedy always in my pocket allays it very quickly.” He had even, he said, passed two successive days without pain, the like of which had not been for the past two years. “I had a lot of joy in life and sat enraptured with the beautiful earth and the heavenly skies which cast their light and shade on it during those two blissful weeks. My only regret that the yearning which I felt to express it all in colour could not be gratified. How I longed for the time when all restrictions on outdoor sketching will be taken away.”

Back again at work at his Kingsway office such time as he got to himself at the week-ends was devoted—by his own desire—to making sketches for the projected work by Mrs. M. H. Spielmann, a romance which was to be presented in the form of a Journal of two Lovers. In some of the many letters that he wrote about this work he had referred to it as a Diary, and on learning that Journal was the title, he wrote: “Journal is a melodious name”, and much superior to the word he had used, adding, “I believe you would have said this, only you could not bear to risk hurting my ridiculous feelings.”

In August 1918 Hugh Thomson was immensely gratified by receiving from America copies of the *Tom Brown* which he had illustrated, accompanied by very pleasant letters from members of the publishing firm. It was followed the next month by another spell of illness, after which, within six weeks of the coming of the Armistice, he wrote with







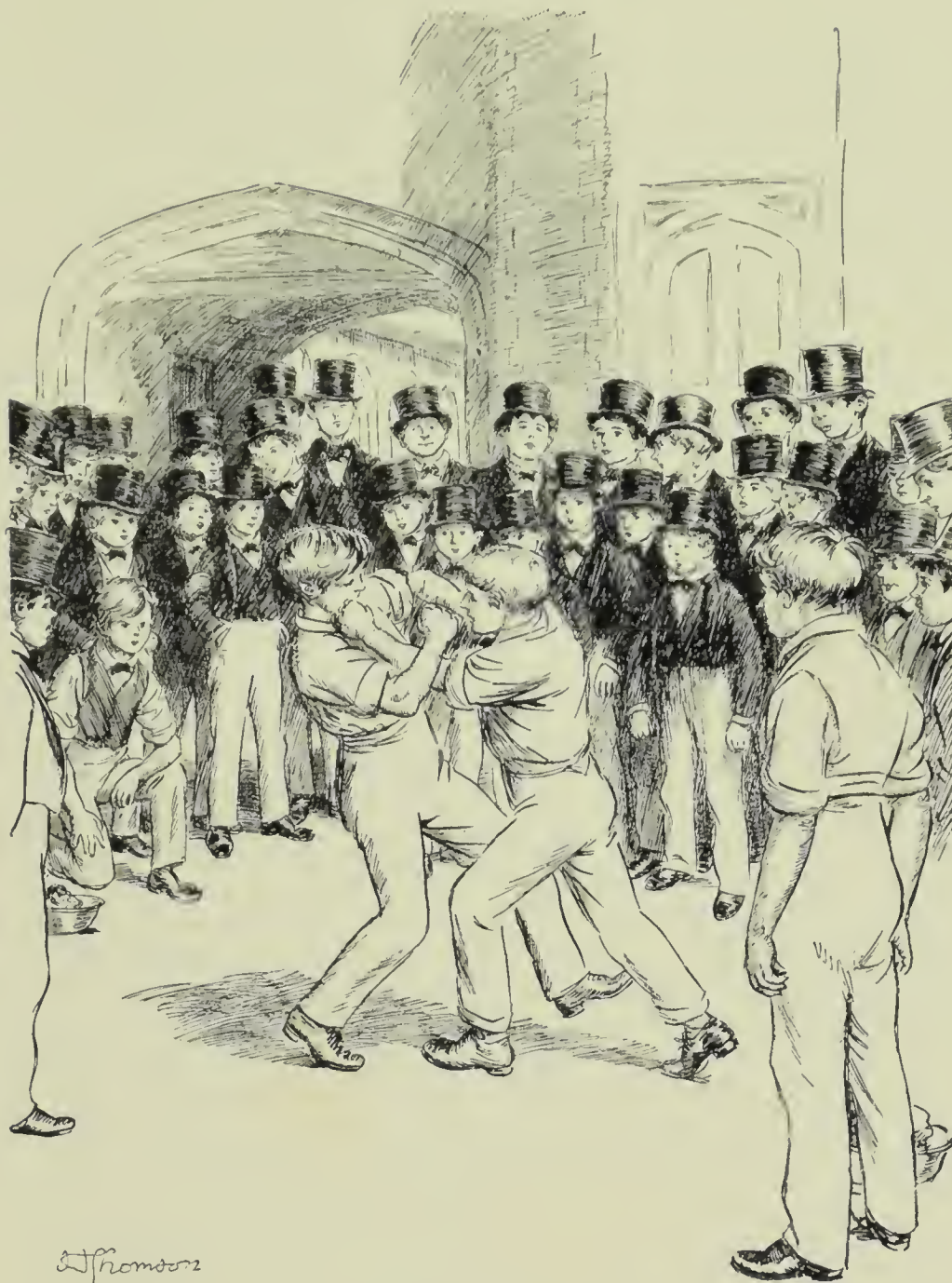
When the merry Bells ring round,  
And the jocund rebecks sound  
To many a youth, and many a maid,

Dancing in the chequer'd shade;  
And young and old come forth to play  
On a sunshine holiday.

Milton's "L'Allegro".

From one of six designs for colour-prints commissioned by J. Castell & Co.  
for writing-pad covers, 1914





## THE FIGHT

in the Quadrangle, between Tom Brown and Slogger Williams—at Rugby in the old days

*From "Tom Brown's School Days", published by Ginn & Co., 1918*

confidence of the approaching end of the war: "I did not think I should live to see even this happy turn of the tide. God bless you all my children." To Mr. A. G. Chuter, his



official head at the C.I.R., he wrote at about the same time: "I have been up since yesterday forenoon, and am today longing to get out for a breath of air, but the wind is too chilly, they say. Were it not for the uncomfortable heart sensations, to be expected under the circumstances, I am feeling very strong and able to do my 48 hours with any one. Who knows but that I may be challenging you to golf in a year or two (Ah, if I could really think so!) Long before that we shall have downed the Kaiser by 10 up and 8 to play and, I hope, won both bye and bye bye. At any rate, the cheerful news from the Front helps one along, and the chastened tone of the Central braggarts. If one could keep out of one's mind the mutilation and wiping out of the splendid young lives one could be happy about things this winter."

The collapse of the "Central braggarts" was to be more rapid than he had dared to believe, and soon he was giving expression to the joy he felt at the restoration to public view of works of art that had been placed in safe seclusion during the time of danger from air raids. "How delightful it is to see the glowing old favourites coming out again at the National Gallery. I wonder have the Siddons and the Temeraire been cleaned in their retirement. How brilliant they appear—and what an exquisitely distinguished show is that of the lately acquired. How grateful we should be to you all who help us to such things. But I wish we could see more water colour art in the centre of the town. The Turners are shut up and one longs to see good De Wints, Cotmans, and others of that delightful time when everybody seemed so simple and sincere—and masterly. Now that the B.M. is opening some of its galleries could not the Print Room let us see some of its refreshing treasures in this kind?"

Early in 1919 Hugh received a commission from Sir Isidore Spielmann (who had been seeking to be of help to the artist) to design the Diploma for the British Arts and Crafts Exhibition about to be held in Paris, but while at the C.I.R. he had only his Sundays free on which to do such

work. Then in February came another set-back in health from his having to walk from Kingsway to Victoria Station owing to the impossibility of getting a seat in an omnibus in the fight for places in view of the expected strike of the omnibusmen. After nearly a week at home he wrote to his chief saying, "Suffering from strikitis and so unwarrantly staying away from work (?) I can't possibly take pay for the absent time and in regard to this I have a suggestion to make later when I have finished what I want to say." He continued by asking that he should be permitted to resign forthwith, but would go to the office to "complete a ledgering job" on which he had been engaged, and added, "the suggestion which I wish to make is that the week or so which the job may occupy should stand against the time I have been away". When chaffed on his over-conscientiousness in this matter he protested that "that tough old conscience of mine enabled me to sit tight on the C.I.R. for a good long time. Don't chip it or run it down!"

The anticipated return to complete the "ledgering job" was to be abandoned. Hugh wrote at the close of the month that he had been a little too optimistic. He had once more been laid low with influenza. "I am now through Tophet and allowed to sit up. . . . The temperature lasting so long has rather burnt me out, and very little tires me. But a day or two will see me like a young three-year-old, I believe." Again he was too hopeful, it being mid-March before he could get to work on the Paris Diploma. Then, writing to the friend who had obtained him his post at the C.I.R. to tell him of his resignation, he said that ever since the Armistice he had had qualms about continuing, and with a little work to go on with he felt it was less "reckless" giving it up. "Last summer (1918) a firm of wholesale paper makers and stationers for whom I had already done some half dozen designs<sup>1</sup> (just about

<sup>1</sup> These were charming designs in water-colours done for Messrs. John Castell and Co.—two of them illustrating Browning's "Pied Piper of Hamelin" and the remaining four, admirably delicate designs picturing passages in "L'Allegro" of Milton.

the time of the outbreak of the war) wrote asking me to execute another set with a possibility of another set to follow. I consented on condition that they should wait for some time (I did not wish to throw up the Commission as at that time employment there was in full swing, and I did not feel that I was occupying anybody's job). However, about the beginning of February I had a reminder from this firm, and that together with this of Sir Isidore's which I could see no prospect of getting finished in reasonable time with only Sunday to work on it made me decide to take the plunge."

In sending in his resignation to Mr. Chuter, Hugh had said, "I think Art will probably give me a crumb now and again", and little more than a month later the hope was realised in the offer of a commission from Macmillans to do another volume of the *Highways and Byways* to deal with Gloucestershire ("this puts me out of any anxiety for a long time"). Further good news which he sends on to a friend as to his son having obtained a good appointment at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, while for himself "it is delightful to get back to drawing, but I am sure that my time at the Commission besides having a good effect, on the whole (regular hours and just the amount of exercise prescribed) has, by contrast, enhanced the pleasure of a return to drawing". For some weeks he kept "pegging away" at the Arts and Crafts Diploma, "doing a part every day according to whether I tire or not. But I can say with truth that I am thoroughly enjoying the doing of it."

Writing to Mrs. Spielmann of her lately published novel, *The Sterndales*, Hugh found himself regretting its occasional "melancholy", while admitting that it is "better to be a George Gissing than a Charles Garvice" and, suggesting that a whole novel might be written based on one of its chapters, he went on to speak of Gissing with keenest appreciation, and to confess himself ashamed of having been interested in reading a certain book concerning that novelist—"Froude on the Carlyles was as nothing to it. And of



course the fact that the book was brilliantly written and intensely if morbidly interesting, damned the author of it, and the reader, like me, for enjoying it all the more." At about the same time he wrote to her concerning the announcement that her brother was to be High Commissioner of Palestine:

I read in the newspaper some days ago of Mr. Herbert Samuel's appointment and recognised that it was a very onerous and responsible job which he had been asked to undertake. But his record in clearing up things is so good that even his political opponents—the present Government—had to turn to him. Apart entirely from his relationship to you I had always been much interested in watching his career, so far as my limited horizon admitted, and the clean decisive workmanlike way in which all he has undertaken has been accomplished—the soundness of everything which he puts his hand to do—always struck me. Velazquez and Peter de Wint in painting seem to me to have that kind of brain capacity and then doing it in the crispest broadest boldest manner. I have always thought that . . . his is a personality to inspire confidence as opposed to the wild and partly hysterical enthusiasms which partisans feel for their particular man.

When Hugh had been offered the commission to make sketches for the *Gloucestershire* volume his wife and son had strongly opposed the idea of his undertaking the work, seeing his state of health and the insidious nature of his malady. But the feeling of relief at the cessation of the war, the having no longer to take part in the daily struggle to and from the office, and the prospect of carrying on once more at the work in which he delighted, made the artist feel that he would be able to carry on with the assistance of the friendly drug which alleviated attacks. Thus it was that in the summer he journeyed down to Gloucester (making 8 Brunswick Square his headquarters) and began the work.

Of course [he wrote] I cannot do as I used to do on these excursions—go freely about. I have to crawl to a station or garage, take a train or a motor-bus, and where I used to dash off work with great facility—that is, work of this kind—I now do everything very laboriously owing to the time it takes to get to my destination and the time it takes to get back. But once I am settled at my subject on a comfortable seat I am

as happy and at ease as can be. There are days when depression comes with the consciousness of the difference betwixt now and then, but this is ungrateful when one reflects that to have work and to be able to do it however tediously is what I never expected again in life. Gloucester is a splendid centre for getting to all the old historic spots in the county. . . . It tried me very much at first and I thought I should have to give up, but I now find that by resting every other day or so I can manage. I should hate to have to give in after insisting, against the wishes of my wife and John, in undertaking the job when it was offered me. . . . I had taken train to Cheltenham, and thence by electric tram to an elevated spot called Cleeve Hill nearly 1000 ft. up which the tram climbs most accommodately. It was a divine day and the air like wine and it was whilst sitting there and drinking it in that I thought of you and wondered would not such a place have a most invigorating effect on *you*? I spent the day there making two or three attempts to sketch the view but it is really beyond drawing to give the air, the colour, the intoxicating quality of such a scene.

Towards the end of the stay in the county, when Hugh was congratulating himself on getting along, the "infernal" railway strike broke out, and, as he wrote to Mr. Cluter from Bibury, "I twiddled my thumbs in my Gloster lodging for some days and then with a groan determined to get out with a razor and a toothbrush and a bicycle to do all these parts. First I made for Cirencester, putting up at the George at the top of Birdlip Hill on the way—I could have done the whole distance in a forenoon a few years ago. From there I went to Fairford to see the glass and I have come on here en route to Northleach and places like the Bourtons, Stow on the Wold and Chipping Campden. By that time razor and tooth brush and bike will have been worn out and I must hope the strike will be over; but Britons are an obstinate race and my hope is feeble."

More than three months of summer and autumn were spent in Gloucestershire, and Thomson returned with upwards of 200 sketches,<sup>1</sup> writing after his return home in the latter part

<sup>1</sup> The book was fated to remain unpublished until this present year (1931)—so that there now remains only *The Cricket on the Hearth* among the written works illustrated by Hugh, to place his whole achievement in this class complete before the world.



THE NORTH WALK, THE CLOISTERS, GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL

*From "Highways and Byways in Gloucestershire", by Edward Hutton,  
published by Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1931*

of October, "that beautiful sunshine beckoned to me imperatively to take advantage of it whilst it lasted. And by obeying it I found favour in its sight, and accomplished more than I dreamt could be possible.<sup>1</sup> For the first time in my working

<sup>1</sup> He was so encouraged by his improvement that, as time went on, he seemed to challenge Fate itself by the physical energy in which he riskily indulged. The pocket diary he carried bears witness to the fact that while on the 26th of June (when "Jessie, Mary, and John saw me off") his bicycle cyclometer registered 8352.4, on October the 17th—on which day he took the train back to Paddington—he had increased his score by 530 miles!



life my condition made it absolutely necessary that I should be methodical, and it is perhaps as much to method as to the extraordinary spell of fine weather that I got so much done. But alas when the weather broke and I returned to town, demoralisation set in—a sort of collapse of effort and also of even reasonable belief in what I was doing. I am subject to these attacks and attribute them to the fact that I never had any academical grinding, so that when I draw from my imagination (instead of, as in landscape, sketching where the object can be compared with the copy of it) I am depressed and dissatisfied by the failure to realise on paper what I have in my mind.”

The closing reference was doubtless to the drawings, to which from time to time Hugh returned, for the *Journal of Two Lovers*. There was in November an enquiry as to whether he had time and inclination to undertake an illustrated book for Messrs. Constable, but nothing came of it; and a commission from Mr. Milford, of the Oxford University Press, to illustrate Miss Rebecca Blount's *Schooldays* got no further than the admirable pencil studies for an attractive cover and title-page—it was left uncompleted by his death. In sending out some of those individual greetings which he delighted to pen and draw for the Christmas and New Year season, Hugh said that he was still feeling “the mental effect of the continuous drawing drawing drawing” in Gloucestershire, but he was hoping that with the New Year he would “feel like David when he went out to ‘do up’ Goliath”. Among the season's exchange of courtesies came some neat lines from Austin Dobson—then in his eightieth year—addressed to Mrs. Thomson in acknowledgment of a gift:

The man has good hap,  
And can scarcely be pitied,  
Who can boast such a wrap  
As that you have knitted!

But what pleases me best  
(Though naught could be fitter),



One of a set of illustrations for *The Journal of Two Lovers* (a book not completed). One of the artist's latest water-colours—now in the Folkestone Art Gallery





Is the kind thought expressed  
By the act of the Knitter.

Dear Friend, when the days  
Of the Shadow benight us,  
These Things are the rays  
That mostly delight us.

This pretty trifle in numbers has manifestly been deemed too lightly lyrical to be included in that enchanting volume, *The Complete Poetical Works of Austin Dobson* (Oxford University Press), or even the *Anthology*—notwithstanding that the editor of both of them, Mr. Alban Dobson, has amusingly adopted as the epigraph for the former book Martial's preconceived retort—*Majores majora sonent*.

The year closed with the writing of a brief note, characteristic of the writer in everything but its brevity; he was feeling tired, but was more concerned with imparting pleasant feelings to the recipients than expressing the doleful ones of the sender:

MY DEAR MRS. SPIELMANN—A very happy New Year to you and to my dear M. H. S. and the warmest thanks for that kindest of letters. It is so good of you both to conspire to give me a "guid conceit o' myself". I am meeting the conspirators halfway, and already things are a much lighter blue than they were before your joint letter reached me.—Ever devotedly your victim  
SWLLD. HD. THOMSON.<sup>1</sup>

The New Year to which he had looked forward hopefully was marked by a further attack of heart-trouble, through which, however, he won so far that in the beginning of April he could write, "By now, I am, comparatively speaking, a burly ruffian, but I have my ups and downs". He had been engaged in finishing some of the drawings for *The Journal* (or *Diary*), and in sending them to her insisted—brooking no refusal—upon their having been a labour of love, and that she should accept the drawings and the copyright in them. From that position he refused to budge, and not only

<sup>1</sup> The reader need hardly be told that the signature implies—"Swelled Head Thomson".

was the gift a characteristic expression of the generous gratitude of a particularly sensitive character, it was more—for, with a native courtliness, he made acceptance of the gift a favour done to the giver: “I cannot say how much I thank you for gratifying me by accepting the drawings and copyright in such a gracious way”. It is noteworthy that these drawings were destined to be Hugh Thomson’s last work as book illustrator. Early in April a hint from the author of the contemplated story that it would include a character for which the artist had himself been the unconscious model moved him to lively and chaffing comment:

It is with delighted alarm that I read the last line of your P.P.S. but I must not take it too seriously. It will have the effect of keeping me on my very best behaviour, however, and also of sprucing me up so as to afford you the chance of drawing a portrait of the most undoubted respectability. Of course the worst of you imaginative artists is that we are at your mercy. There is nothing to prevent your decking me out in a sombrero and a floating mane and necktie and taking away my respectable character by such means in order to enhance the picturesque atmosphere. Certainly if I were drawing an artist (literally drawing with pencil and paper) to make him unmistakably so without the help of words these emblems would have to be employed otherwise he would be merely a smug Smith, Brown or Thomson. I wonder at your courage in dreaming of such a venture. Just think of the penalty. You might make of me an enemy for life!!! But seriously that you should entertain such an idea even for a moment flatters me exceedingly. You see what a conceited man I am. I am flattered, and therefore confident that the sketch or silhouette must show me as the perfect one. . . .

Three days later, in response to a letter “so humorous and gay that I really hope that spring is helping you to better health”, he wrote: “I need not say with what greedy anticipation I look forward to your portrait of the perfect man—that’s me. Don’t be deterred by any fear that the critics may dub you an idealist. They may not believe that there could be such a man, but there is one who knows better (his address is 8 Patten Road, S.W. 18) and who is the truth that is stranger than fiction. . . . But no more of my nonsense, dear Mrs. Spielmann. It is all due to intoxication administered by you.”

Although a confirmed invalid, well aware that the end might come at any time, Hugh thus maintained his love of simple, easily aroused fun. But in the end, after all, the book had to be abandoned. And, as to Hugh himself, the end was near. It came about three weeks subsequent to the writing of those pleasantries.

The Diploma design that had been done the previous year had moved some specialist to criticism of certain details, and this led to correspondence in connection with which the artist wrote the following letter—a letter, alas, which was fated to be the last from his hand:

8 PATTEN ROAD, 7th May, 1920.

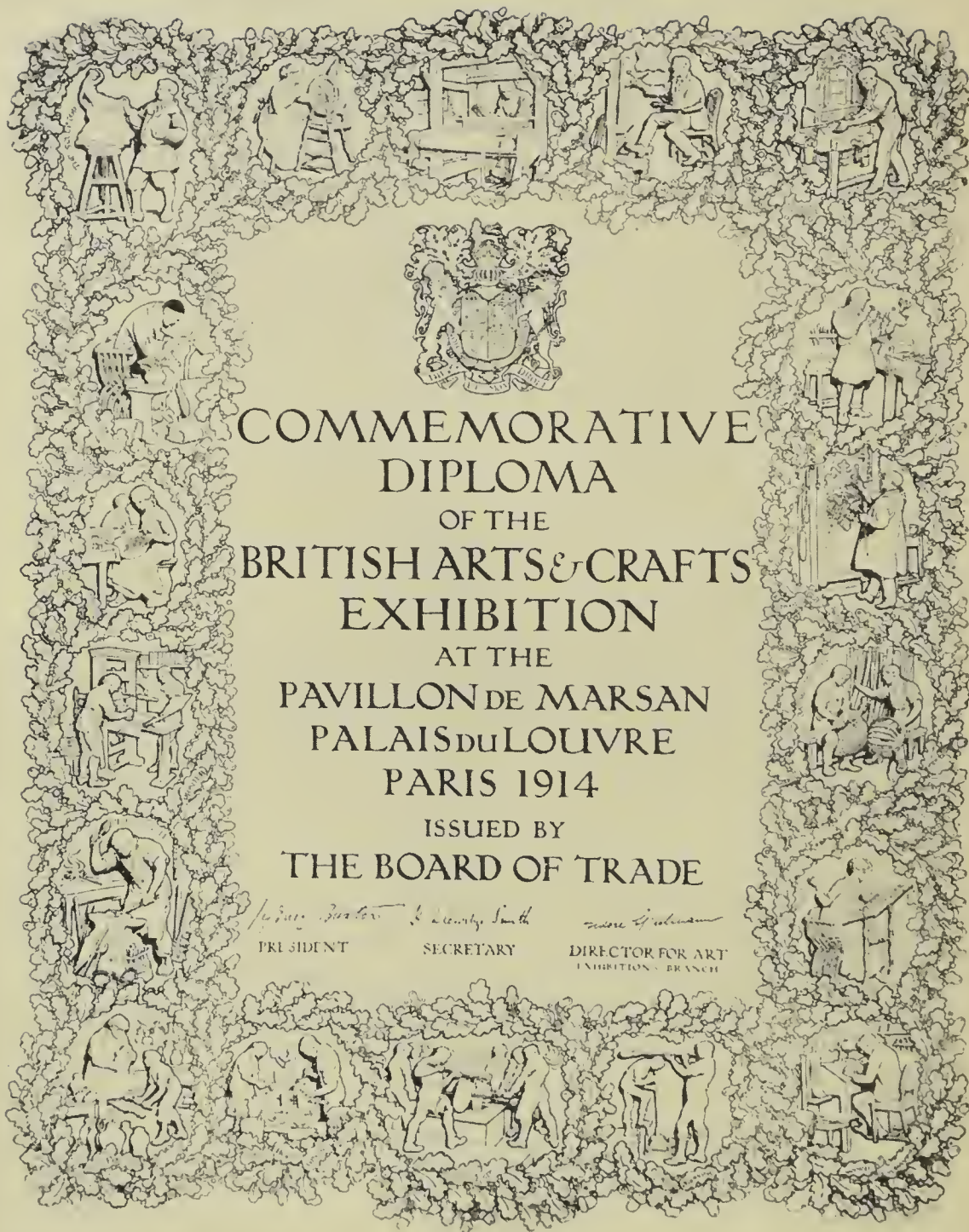
DEAR SIR ISIDORE SPIELMANN—Thank you very much for your philosophical attitude to the fault finding. I am, however, very vexed with myself if anything has been omitted from the loom which ought to have been there. I adapted my drawing from a picture of an Irish linen handloom, but having returned this to my brother at the time am not at the moment able to compare it with my version. At present in the National Gallery there is hanging a picture by Pinturicchio [“The Return of Ulysses (Odysseus) to Penelope”] with a splendid representation of an old loom. I have been to see it but unfortunately am not up in the technicalities and until I consult an expert as to the pedals cannot say whether they are represented in it or not. I hope the critic will let us have particulars of the other defects of which he makes mention. I was perhaps ungenerous in thinking his letter merely a delighted jeer, as he may really have wished to be helpful. Thank you again, dear Sir Isidore, and believe me.—Yours sincerely,

HUGH THOMSON.

Soon after the posting of this letter Hugh Thomson was speaking to a cousin who had come in unexpectedly, when he put his hand to his head as if slightly dazed, saying, “Excuse me a moment”. As he spoke his head fell back and he sank into a chair—and the doctors immediately in attendance declared that even as his head fell the heart had quietly stopped.

It was such a death as he would wish to die.





In this design the vignettes of the typical Arts and Crafts are printed in black and set in the rich border formed of oak-leaves and acorns printed in grey. Each separate subject is beautifully and ingeniously expressive.

The subjects are as follows: The Sculptor. The Spinner. The Weaver. The Painter. The Furniture-maker. The Illuminator. The Lace-worker. The Printer. The Smith. The Silversmith. The Stained-glass Artist. The Basket Maker. The Embroiderer. The Potter. The Bookbinder. The Founder of a Statue. The Glass-blower. The Wood Engraver—eighteen in all. Below appears faintly the inscription—"Isidore Spielmann, invt. Hugh Thomson, del. Emery Walker, engr. The size of the work is twenty-four inches by eighteen inches.

Although in many of those delightfully whimsical letters which he wrote to certain of his friends Hugh Thomson all too early began to speak of himself as an ageing man, and in the later years of invalidism as “an old crock”, he was but a month short of sixty at the time of his death. He sometimes spoke of himself as a lazy man, yet the tale of work achieved, and for the most part of a high standard of excellence, is evidence that the view was merely an expression of his incurable modesty, or else of full intention or ambition unachieved.

For those who knew him only through his art Hugh Thomson's death meant but the cessation of that long series of daintily illustrated and exquisite volumes with which for over thirty years his name had been linked, while the books remained to give permanent joy. For others his death meant the passing of one who was an inspiration to well-being and well-doing; one in whom littlenesses and jealousies, spites and slights, were simply non-existent, one of those rare individuals who—to adapt an illustration from modern science—may be said to stimulate deepest friendship by the ultra-violet rays of character. Mr. Arthur Chuter, who knew him but in the years of his physical failing, said truly, “I have often thought how much more delightful life would be if all were endowed with a character and conscience such as Mr. Thomson possessed”. Tributes paid to his memory by a great diversity of friends—those who had known him all his life long, and others who knew him but in the closing years—show remarkable unity in recognition of the simple sincerity of the man in all he was and did.

Here, too, is the impression of Hugh Thomson recorded for us by his old and discerning friend, Mr. John McNeill. This, while it presents an individual view, lays stress on those characteristics of the artist and the man which were as clear to Sir James Barrie, who met him but on two occasions, as they were to those who knew Hugh Thomson throughout many years of intimate friendship. It may, indeed, be claimed that it confirmed the general impression of him conveyed by



the rather matter-of-fact, incidental story of his life and work as set out in the preceding pages of this volume. Mr. McNeill wrote:

Hugh Thomson was an old friend of mine. I first met him forty years ago; we were both from the same county in the North of Ireland and had many friends in common. Our own friendship was steady and deep. Not once in all that long time did I hear from him a harsh or hasty word, or see a frown on his cheery face. Forty years ago, 20 years ago, 10 years ago—he was exactly the same to his old friends. His residence in London, and the fact that, for long periods, his North of Ireland friends did not see him, made us always curious to note what changes time and success would bring. Such speculations preceded each of his Irish visits. But one minute of his actual presence at once quenched all these idle imaginings. It was the same Hugh Thomson—the first look and word made sure of that—changed in no way, save when, in the last few years, a cruel malady made some inroad on his physical alertness, though powerless to alter the hearty greeting and the well remembered kindly smile.

As a man, Hugh Thomson was of medium height, well built, extraordinarily active and enduring, capable of noted walking feats. Among a hundred folk, his face would have attracted attention—the eyes so keenly observant, but withal so friendly, the head held sometimes sideways, the mobile mouth, the quick whimsical smile, slyly humorous, kindly. . . .

In his bent of mind, he was singularly unworldly and, at all times, greatly disposed to think well of other people. He never took delight in listening to ill-natured criticism. In fact, he was rarely troubled with ill-natured gossip—it was so easy to recognize that the man with whom one was talking shrank from a recital in any way discreditable to our common nature, preferring to think well of men, and disposed to attribute his own chivalrous high-mindedness to those whom he met. This sometimes led to rather remarkable situations.

From all this, it is not to be thought that the fundamental basis of Hugh Thomson's character was easy kindliness and benevolence. It was not. Of the very essence of his being was the unswerving adherence to what was right, the unalterable determination to do all that may become a man. At any turning, one could never imagine his taking any path but that of rectitude—a path that he was sure to follow unswervingly, quietly and without pretence.

It was no surprise to Hugh Thomson's friends when his ability as an artist was recognized by London and the world at large. For my own part, I may say that it often surprised me that no effort—to my knowledge at least—was made to utilize the powers of literary composition



and expression that he undoubtedly possessed. His letters to his friends—when he could be induced to write, for he was by no means an unfailing correspondent—were all that such letters should be. The frank and friendly style, the undoubted gift of vivid narrative and the pleasant unconscious masterly use of this gift, made his letters welcome and treasured by his friends. Among the things I looked forward to and hoped to see was a book *written* by Hugh Thomson and illustrated by Hugh Thomson. That must live in the land of wishes unfulfilled.

Such trifling vanities as conceit or “side” passed him by. He had no necessity to fight against them. For him they simply did not exist—he could not have captured them even if he had so desired. Nor was he any disparager of the work of others. His gift was appreciation not depreciation.

It may be said that, in this brief sketch, I have drawn the picture of an almost flawless character. Apparently this was inevitable. I have carefully searched my memories of forty years and I can remember nothing that I could call blameworthy. That is the way in which Hugh Thomson remains in the memory of his old friends.

JOHN MCNEILL.

And in the memory of those still nearer to him? Here is one of the letters—one no doubt of many—which were addressed to her who, with her son, was left to mourn his beautiful soul, and who shared with him the admiration, the affection, and respect which they gently extorted from all. This letter is yet another from Mr. Justice Dodd, P.C., of whose feeling for Hugh the reader is already cognisant. To the gentle widow—for whose lifetime of devoted and courageous love and help Hugh had himself declared his gratitude—sunk in sadness, he, the sad widower, wrote freely:

My heart goes out to you. I cannot say much more to you than that just now. Later on we may get some shadow of comfort from recalling how big-hearted and big-brained a man he was; how fine an artist, and how true, and pure, and good. At present I can only think that I will never see his dear face again. . . . As I write I look up and see over my mantel, “The Church”,<sup>1</sup> with his name and mine on it. What can there be of reproach to me in my longing that I could just once more see him?

I know from sad experience that at such a time it is the little things that count. I was told that Time was a great healer. I have not found

<sup>1</sup> The frontispiece of *Donegal and Antrim*.

it so. You will have to endure. Memory is the only Consoler. We can dwell in the past, now that the future is dimmed for us. Courage brave heart! We must not fail the dead! We must act as they would have us act. But it is not forbidden to weep. . . . Oh, that I could have a sight of his dear face—but we must with patience bear what it is not given to us to change. Be of good courage, my dear woman! Life has something still for you to do, and to endure! I speak it as a command from Hugh. And so blessings and benedictions follow you through the coming year.

YOUR OLD FRIEND.

What, one finds oneself asking, must have been the man whose death could draw forth such burning words of sorrow and compassion, “watering love with tears”? The tribute from Judge Dodd came from one who had always been solicitous for the happiness and welfare of Hugh and his wife and sought to cheer the way and by pretty subterfuge attempt—but always without success—to help smooth their financial way. And he, the “strong and upright judge”, who, when the present writer begged him for his memories of Hugh, said simply he could not comply, for “my memory of Hugh is too sacred”.



*Photo: Hoffe*

MRS. HUGH THOMSON IN 1930





## CHAPTER IX

### HUGH THOMSON AS ARTIST: JUDGEMENT BY HIS PEERS



THE story of Hugh Thomson's life has now been told. By way of Epilogue, however, we may devote our concluding pages to two very admirable appreciations of his work as an artist, written for us by two men than whom few—if any—in this country are more competent to

speak: namely, Sir Bernard Partridge, and the late William Pitcher (the latter more widely known under his pseudonym "C. Wilhelm"), and both of them in earlier days members of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water-Colours:

I knew Hugh Thomson only slightly [the former writes], having met him but twice: but that was quite enough to bring me under the spell of his simple charm of character and manner: and I have always regretted that I saw no more of him. I recall vividly his aptness and humour in conversation, and the delicious brogue that gave them an added flavour. Both of those two meetings with him were in congenial company.

Do you remember the old National Club in Whitehall Gardens? Oh, it was the broth of a club! Austin Dobson put me up for it, and it was there, and in his company, that I met Hugh Thomson. Dobson used to walk over to the Club every afternoon from the Board of Trade, which at that time was situated a few yards north of Whitehall Gardens. He knew I wanted to know Thomson, and arranged our meeting over the tea-cups at the National Club. The fourth member of our symposium was that brilliant, baffling, many-sided pen-and-pencil wit, James F. Sullivan: and a delightful afternoon I spent: we were all naturally sympathetic, and we talked of art and Shakespeare and the musical glasses. Thomson, I remember, was quite expansive, and delighted me with the alertness of his thought and the nimbleness of his talk.

The Initial letter is from *The Chase*, by Wm. Somervile (George Redway, 1896).

Of Thomson's work I was a great admirer: it was so simple and direct in statement, so fluid in line, and above all so exquisitely in sympathy with his "period". Never laboured, either: I know nothing of what his methods were, but his pen-work always gave the impression of having been produced with great ease. You surprise me about his laborious production. He gives quite the opposite impression, which after all is another feather in his cap. "*Ars*" (or a part of it, evidently) "*est celare laborem*". His settings, too, were the complement of his figures: they never seemed put in to "pull the thing together": some of his little landscape backgrounds are as tenderly touched in as anything in the whole range of English line-drawing. Of course he owed a lot to Caldecott, but Caldecott would have delighted in his disciple. I remember what I think was his first published work—some theatrical sketches done for the *English Illustrated Magazine* when Comyns Carr was Editor:—Carr "discovered" him, didn't he? These drawings were poor indeed—weak and inexpressive: had they not been cut on wood they might have made a better appearance, but they were sorry stuff, not a doubt of it. But Carr stuck to him; and when a few months later he was illustrating a story of Bret Harte's in the same magazine, there was a glimpse of what his powers were going to be; then came the admirable *Sir Roger de Coverley* series, and he had found himself at last—in the glow of his beloved eighteenth century. From that point, I think, his work went on an ascending scale up to the end.

BERNARD PARTRIDGE.

More comprehensive, and not less acute, is the admirable estimate contributed by William Pitcher covering nearly the whole field of Hugh Thomson's art:

It is always a matter of regret to me that I missed the opportunity of meeting Hugh Thomson. You know how strongly the fanciful daintiness of his work appealed to me. I found myself acquiring for leisurely enjoyment each of the books he illustrated as soon as it appeared.

When his spirited drawings first graced the pages of the *English Illustrated Magazine* in the 'Eighties, one felt that his pencil was predestined to decorate the Georgian and Early Victorian novelists. In those days he showed perhaps more mastery of the horse in action—I am thinking particularly of *Coaching Days and Coaching Ways*—than of the feminine charm that was later to be so conspicuous a feature of his work. But his sense of character was there from the very first, and delicate as his "line" was, it never lacked strength and decision. It was wonderful to me how much detail he managed to suggest with a few strokes of his sensitive pen. His range was so comprehensive. Individual character—knowledge of costume—a keen sense of whimsical humour, alike in his horses and dogs as in his diverting types of country folk—



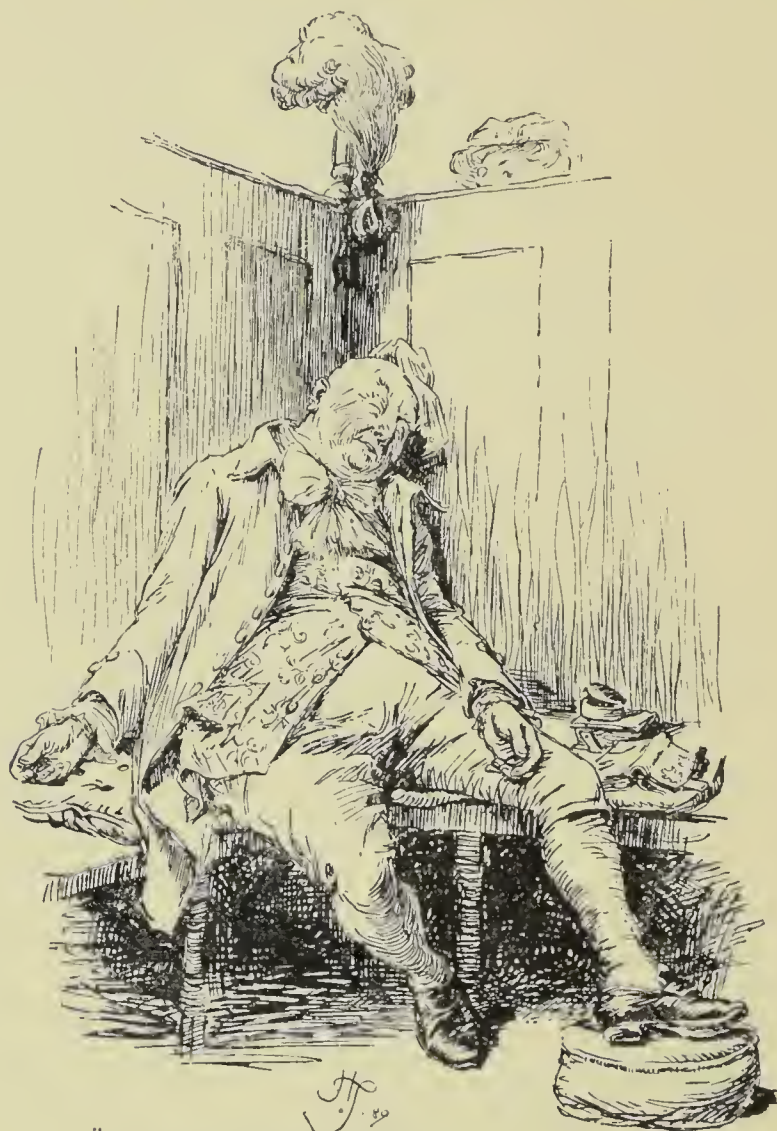
And what a draughtsman he was!—Could anything be more masterly than his rendering of the Great Hall at Hampton Court, and his view of “Swakeleys”?—to quote only a couple of examples from his “Middlesex” in the *Highways and Byways* series—a series in which his unfailing intuition for the picturesque may be gathered from countless sketches of rural localities, winding lanes and distant prospects.

Perhaps his ingenious chapter-headings—grouping his figures with band-boxes, palings and what-not as mediums for his lettering—(such beautiful script!)—and his decorated “Initials”, have given me as much pleasure as anything; there was a frolicsome invention about them, a sense of enjoyment of his own work that was delightful and stimulating. But if I start telling you of my special preferences, it will be a lengthy list. “Dolly saddling the grey mare” in *Beau Brocade*—(Austin Dobson and Hugh Thomson—what an ideal alliance!)—and again the dainty artificial grace of the Marquise and her satellites in another poem. There’s a jolly mounted “postboy blowing his horn” in *Cranford*, and a trio of riders galloping over the Moor—in *Our Village*, I think—miracles of energy and action. You see I am no good at horses and such-like myself, so am all the more ready to enthuse when a more accomplished pencil depicts them for me. *Cranford*, I think, contains some of Thomson’s best work, there is a pathos and dignity about one of his drawings of Miss Matty that he has never surpassed, not even in the tender grace of the kneeling figure of Miss Phoebe—“keeping the flag flying”—in the more recent *Quality Street*, all the illustrations to which (not forgetting the delightful “end-papers”) reveal his peculiar sympathy with a period that has inspired his pencil no less happily than Barrie’s pen. Possibly most people would consider *Our Village* Hugh Thomson’s masterpiece, and I remember with peculiar pleasure his country children, his yokels “staring at a balloon”, and the vigour and character of “the thickest of the fray”, in which his fun is never betrayed into caricature. As an instance, too, of his success in gaining an effect with the simplest means, there is a drawing of two figures laden with “cloaks and umbrellas” on a sloppy country road, which it would be impossible to better.

His children are always a perfect joy. In an article, *A Whitechapel Street*—in 1890, if I remember rightly—he has drawn a group of ragamuffins round “The Board School Gate” with an adventurous urchin perched up aloft, that, in all the qualities of arrangement, humour, and execution, reaches, to my mind, the high water-mark of accomplishment. Ten years later, in *A Kentucky Cardinal* he gave us a sketch of some predatory youngsters in a strawberry-bed, which, though slighter in treatment, is no less full of “life” and observation.

I must confess to a strong partiality for the *Peg Woffington* drawings. Hugh Thomson never did anything better than his Hogarthian beau,

Sir Charles Pomander, displaying his indolent affectations on the Green Room settee; and I am always filled with admiration for his illustration of that same Green Room, with pictures on the wall in difficult per-



*"In the most pathetic parts  
of my sermon,"*

"THE SQUIRE WOULD SOMETIMES FALL ASLEEP"

*Illustration from "The Vicar of Wakefield", by Oliver Goldsmith  
(Macmillan & Co.)*

spective, for one of the episodes in which Peg and Triplet figure—his "Triplet" by the way, is altogether admirable. There is a dainty drawing, too, of Vane, "purring" his devotion to Peg in the most elegant of Georgian interiors.

To Samuel Johnson, LL.D.



Dear Sir, — By inscribing this slight performance to you, I do not mean so much to compliment you as myself. It may do me some honour to inform the public, that I have lived many years in intimacy with you. It may serve the interests of mankind also to inform them, that the greatest wit may be found in a character, without impairing the most unaffected piety.

I have, particularly, reason to thank you for your partiality to this performance. The undertaking a comedy not merely sentimental was very dangerous; and Mr Colman, who saw this piece in its various stages, always thought it so. However, I ventured to trust it to the Public; and, though it was necessarily delayed till late in the season, I have every reason to be grateful.

I am Dear Sir, your most sincere friend and admirer,

Oliver Goldsmith

“SUCH BEAUTIFUL SCRIPT!” (See William Pitcher’s tribute)

Oliver Goldsmith’s Dedication of “*She Stoops to Conquer*” to Dr. Johnson,  
published by Hodder & Stoughton, 1912



It would be easy to cite instances of Hugh Thomson's love of Nature. His country roads and glimpses of upland pasture are always much more than mere accessories to his figure subjects. I recall some illustrations to Walton's *Complete Angler*, contributed to the *English Illustrated Magazine* of 1899, which have all the charm and conviction of a pastoral by Alfred Parsons, with their willows and browsing cattle and the precision of their flower drawing. Just as these and kindred subjects suggest the possible influence of Parsons, so, too, in the technique of his pen-work in—say—the *Vicar of Wakefield*—one detects an appreciation of Edwin Abbey's work on similar lines. It is clear to see that Dr. Primrose and his family must have been congenial figures to the artist. The good Vicar appears occasionally a little youthful to be the father of Olivia and Sophia, though he lacks nothing of kindly dignity in most of the illustrations. The picture of the old Squire fallen asleep "in the most pathetic parts of my sermon" is a triumph. One can positively hear him snore!—whilst the drawings of Moses with "neighbour Flam-borough's rosy daughters"; a group of village musicians, "the great Whiston controversy", and of the Vicar's youngsters rifling Squire Thornhill's pockets breathe the very spirit of Goldsmith.

Again, in *Beau Brocade*, in one of the illustrations to a Gentlewoman of the Old School (where she has dozed off on the window seat), with what exquisite lightness and conviction has H. T. touched in the effect of the short muslin blinds blowing out of window! And the companion sleepy angler, in the Gentleman of the Old School; and the "ghostly" heading to the "Old Sedan Chair"; and the dear little "Ladies of St. James's". . . . Well, one could easily pick out each and every drawing as a gem—surely Austin Dobson must have felt he had an *ideal* illustrator of his delightful verse. It is a precious little tome! Looking at the wonderful poise and action of most of the figures, the men especially—it is difficult to believe they can have been drawn without the living model to work from.

Yet another facet in his many-sided art shows his curiously personal feeling for design, more especially in the characteristic book-covers which he originated and made peculiarly his own. Ignoring the more or less conventional severity of ornament which, to critical eyes, would seem the appropriate treatment for the purpose, he went to the other extreme, and lavished on his bindings arrangements of natural flowers and plants in rich effects of gilding—arrangements that appeared almost haphazard in their "placing". In some cases, too, he utilised the oddest material—such as rings of teacups and teaspoons (for *Quality Street*) to form his decorative patterns. At other times, scattered blossoms—rather after the Kate Greenaway fashion—gave a happier result. But it must be confessed that the success of his cover designs amply justified the means he employed.

Hugh Thomson's sympathetic pencil has added a fresh lustre to many gems of English literature, and I feel I owe you a debt of gratitude for giving me the opportunity of adding this little sprig of laurel to the Chaplet that all artists must gladly dedicate to his memory.

WILLIAM PITCHER.

Such was the Man and such his Art. And here we redeem the long-due debt of our admiration and our affection.—  
Dear Hugh Thomson—Farewell! M. H. S.



Tailpiece to *Pride and Prejudice*  
Published by George Allen, 1894



THE BOOK-PLATE OF MRS. ROSE THOMAS  
(With other roses peeping in, and Time at work by Dial and Scythe)  
Lent by Carmichael Thomas, Esq.





THE READER

Drawn by Hugh Thomson for a Private Publication

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HUGH THOMSON'S PRINTED WORK

- I. BOOKS WHOLLY OR IN PART ILLUSTRATED BY HIM.
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BOOK-PLATES; MENU AND OTHER CARDS, ETC.
- V. SELECTED ARTICLES ON HUGH THOMSON AND HIS WORK IN  
CURRENT LITERATURE.
- VI. AUTHORS WHOSE BOOKS, ETC., WERE ILLUSTRATED BY HIM.

## I

BOOKS WHOLLY OR IN PART ILLUSTRATED BY  
HUGH THOMSON

(An asterisk [\*] denotes that the volume was re-issued in later editions.)

1. 1884. *Charlie Asgarde*. By Alfred St. Johnston. (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
2. 1886. *Pickwick Papers*. By Charles Dickens. Jubilee Edition. (Sketches mostly re-drawn from contemporary periodicals. Vol. i. pp. xvi, xix, xx, 72, 78, 79, 123, 350, 356, 369, 465, 486; vol. ii. pp. 238, 275, 327, 487.) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
3. *Days with Sir Roger de Coverley*. A Reprint from the "Spectator". (All the drawings, with the exception of the heading to the List of Illustrations, had appeared in the *English Illustrated Magazine*.<sup>\*1</sup> One or two of the drawings were not reprinted here.) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
4. 1888. *Coaching Days and Coaching Ways*. By W. Outram Tristram.\* (All but seven of the illustrations had appeared in the *E.I.M.*) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
5. 1890. *The Vicar of Wakefield*. By Oliver Goldsmith.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
6. 1891. *Cranford*. By Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell.\*<sup>2</sup> (Issued in 1898 with illustrations coloured by the artist.) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
7. *The Antiquary*. By Sir Walter Scott. (Adam & Charles Black, now A. & C. Black, Ltd.)
8. *The Bride of Lammermoor*. By Sir Walter Scott. (Adam & Charles Black.)
9. 1892. *The Ballad of Beau Brocade*. By Austin Dobson.\* (In the second issue, at p. 18, the flap of the Highwayman's coat

<sup>1</sup> Henceforward referred to thus: *E.I.M.*

<sup>2</sup> There were two unauthorised and undated American issues of this, small and ill-done, with about one-half of H. T.'s illustrations, but without any mention of his name; one with the imprint of Hurst & Company, and the other, The F. M. Lupton Publishing Company, both of New York.

was removed. A limited number of volumes of a later pocket edition had the drawings tinted by an alien hand.) (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.)

10. 1893. *Our Village*. By Mary Russell Mitford.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
11.     *The Piper of Hamelin. A Fantastic Opera in Two Acts*. By Robert Buchanan.\* (The Chiswick Press.) The first issue was for the theatre; the published volume appeared simultaneously with a re-set title-page by William Heine-  
mann.
12. 1894. *Pride and Prejudice*. By Jane Austen.\* (George Allen, now George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.)
13.     *Coridon's Song and Other Verses from Various Sources*.\* (The illustrations to this had all appeared in the *E.I.M.*) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
14.     *St. Ronan's Well*. By Sir Walter Scott.\* In the "Dryburgh Edition." (Illustrations engraved on wood in the re-issue, except the frontispiece in photogravure.) (Adam & Charles Black, now A. & C. Black, Ltd.)
15.     *The Dead Gallant, and The King of Hearts*. By Outram Tristram. Only the second story was illustrated by Hugh Thomson. (The former, illustrated by St. George Hare, had been first published in *The Graphic*, Dec. 1893, and the latter in 1889 under the title "The Moat House".) (Ward, Lock & Bowden, now Ward, Lock & Co., Ltd.)
16. 1895. *The Story of Rosina and Other Verses*. By Austin Dobson.\* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.)
17. 1896. *Sense and Sensibility*. By Jane Austen.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
18.     *Emma*. By Jane Austen.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
19.     *The Chase*. By William Somervile. (George Redway.)
20. 1897. *Highways and Byways in Devon and Cornwall*. By A. H. Norway.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
21.     *Mansfield Park*. By Jane Austen.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
22.     *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*. By Jane Austen.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
23. 1898. *Riding Recollections. (Inside the Bar.)* By G. J. Whyte-Melville. (Thacker & Co.)



24. 1898. Highways and Byways in North Wales. By A. G. Bradley.\*  
(Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
25. Jack the Giant Killer. (First, and only, issue of *Hugh Thomson's Illustrated Fairy Books.*) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
26. 1899. Peg Woffington. By Charles Reade.\* (George Allen, now  
George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.)
27. This and That. By Mrs. Molesworth.\* (Macmillan & Co.,  
Ltd.)
28. Inside the Bar. By G. J. Whyte-Melville. In one volume  
with *Market Harborough*, illustrated by another artist.  
(Thacker & Co.)
29. Highways and Byways in Donegal and Antrim. By Stephen  
Gwynn.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
30. Highways and Byways in Yorkshire. By A. H. Norway.\*  
(Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
31. 1901. A Kentucky Cardinal and Aftermath. By James Lane  
Allen.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
32. Ray Farley. By J. Moffatt and Ernest Druce. (T. Fisher  
Unwin, now incorporated with Ernest Benn, Ltd.)
33. 1902. The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty  
Diamond. By W. M. Thackeray. (Wells Gardner, Darton  
& Co.)
34. Highways and Byways in London. By Mrs. E. T. Cook.\*  
(Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
35. 1903. Evelina. By Fanny Burney.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
36. Tales from Maria Edgeworth.\* Ed. by F. J. Harvey Darton.  
(Wells Gardner, Darton & Co.)
37. Littledom Castle and other Tales. By Mrs. M. H. Spiel-  
mann.\* (George Routledge & Sons.)
38. 1904. Tales of the Canterbury Pilgrims. By F. J. Harvey  
Darton.\* (Wells Gardner, Darton & Co.)
39. 1905. The History of Henry Esmond. By W. M. Thackeray.\*  
(Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
40. 1906. Scenes of Clerical Life. By George Eliot.\* (Partly in  
colour. (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)

41. 1906. *The Fair Hills of Ireland*. By Stephen Gwynn.\* (Partly in colour.) (Maunsel & Co., and Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
42. 1907. *Silas Marner*. By George Eliot. (Mainly in colour.) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
43.       *Highways and Byways in Kent*. By Walter Jerrold.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
44. 1908. *My Son and I*. By Mrs. M. H. Spielmann. (George Allen & Sons, now George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.)
45.       *Highways and Byways in Surrey*. By Eric Parker.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
46.       *Pilgrims' Tales from Chaucer*. By F. J. Harvey Darton.\* (Being a reprint—reduced in format—of part of the 1904 volume.) (Wells Gardner, Darton & Co.)
47. 1909. *Highways and Byways in Middlesex*. By Walter Jerrold. (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
48.       *As You Like It*. By William Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> (In colour.) (Hodder & Stoughton.)
49.       *London at Prayer*. By Charles Morley. (Smith, Elder & Co., now incorporated with John Murray.)
50.       *The Rainbow Book*. By Mrs. M. H. Spielmann.\* (Chatto & Windus.)
51.       *Country Pictures*. (A selection in miniature from Mitford volume of 1893.) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
52. 1910. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. By William Shakespeare.<sup>2</sup> (In colour.) (William Heinemann.)
53. 1911. *The School for Scandal*. By R. B. Sheridan.<sup>3</sup> (In colour.) (Hodder & Stoughton.)
54. 1912. *She Stoops to Conquer*. By Oliver Goldsmith. (In colour.) (Hodder & Stoughton.)
55. 1913. *Quality Street*. By J. M. Barrie. (In colour.) (Hodder & Stoughton.)

<sup>1</sup> There was an issue of this in French.

<sup>2</sup> There was also a German edition of this.

<sup>3</sup> There was a French edition, with variations, issued in Paris, 1912.

56. 1913. *Highways and Byways in the Border*. By Andrew and John Lang.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
57.       *The Chimes*. By Charles Dickens. (In colour). (Hodder & Stoughton.)
58. 1914. *The Admirable Crichton*. By J. M. Barrie. (In colour.) (Hodder & Stoughton.)
59. 1915. *The Famous Cities of Ireland*. By Stephen Gwynn. (Partly in colour. The drawings for this volume were done at the same time as those for the "Fair Hills" of 1906.) (Maunsell & Co., and The Macmillan Co., N.Y.)
60. 1916. *Highways and Byways in Galloway and Carrick*. By C. W. Dick.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
61. 1917. *The Germans as Others See Them*. By Sir Isidore Spielmann, C.M.G.<sup>1</sup>
62. 1918. *Germany's Impending Doom*. By Sir Isidore Spielmann, C.M.G.<sup>1</sup>
63.       *Tom Brown's School Days*. By Thomas Hughes.\* (This edition was published by Ginn & Co., New York. A second, "Trade", edition with 2 colour-plates, larger in format but without the Notes, was put forth by Le Roy Phillips, Boston, in 1920.)
64. 1920. *The Scarlet Letter*. By Nathaniel Hawthorne. (In colour.) (Methuen & Co.)
65.       *Highways and Byways in Northumbria*. By P. Anderson Graham.\* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
66. 1931. *Highways and Byways in Gloucestershire*. By Edward Hutton. (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)

## AS YET UNPUBLISHED

67. 1913. *The Cricket on the Hearth*. By Charles Dickens. (In colour.)
68. 1920. *The Journal of Two Lovers*. By Mrs. M. H. Spielmann. (The text not completed.)

<sup>1</sup> Translations of these were widely circulated as official war propaganda.



## II

BOOKS CONTAINING INCIDENTAL ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY HUGH THOMSON

69. 1908. *De Libris*. By Austin Dobson. (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
70. 1918. *A Bookman's Budget*. By Austin Dobson. (H. Milford, Oxford University Press.)
71. 1918. *Douglas Jerrold, Dramatist and Wit*. By Walter Jerrold. (Water-colour Sketch, vol. i. p. 350.) (Hodder & Stoughton.)
72. 1919. *Titmarsh Club List of Members*. (With reproductions of menu cards, including five by H. T. and one—that for the eighth dinner by Edmund Dulac—wrongly ascribed to him: an error corrected in later issues.)
73. N.D. *The Red Book for Girls, and The Red Book for Children*. Edited by Mrs. Herbert Strang. (These, issued by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, included only blocks lent for the purpose by Hodder & Stoughton, who had already used them.)

## III

CONTRIBUTIONS TO MAGAZINES AND OTHER  
PERIODICALS

(*Note.*—*The Yearly Volumes of the "English Illustrated Magazine" (here given as E.I.M.) begin in the Month of October. An asterisk [\*] denotes that the drawings appeared later in book form.*)

74. 1884. *E.I.M.* June. *Two Centuries of Bath*. By H. D. Traill.
75.         June. *Drawing-room Dances*. By H. Sutherland Edwards.
76.         Sept. *Tour of Covent Garden*. By Austin Dobson.
77.         *Cricket*. By Andrew Lang.
78.         Oct. *Rotten Row*. (The Horse: Ancient and Modern.)  
By Alfred E. T. Watson.

79. 1884. *E.I.M.* Nov. Play. A Scene from the Last Century.  
 80. Dec. The Squire at Vauxhall. Poem by Austin Dobson.  
 81. 1885. *E.I.M.* Jan.-Feb. The Dramatic Outlook. By Henry  
 Arthur Jones. Parts I. and II.  
 82. March-May. A Ship of '49. By Bret Harte. In Three  
 Parts.  
 83. Oct. The Incomplete Angler. By Basil Field.  
 84. Dec. A Day with Sir Roger de Coverley.\* By Joseph  
 Addison ("Spectator").  
 85. 1886. Jan. Charles Lamb in Hertfordshire. Old Blakesworth  
 House. By Alfred Ainger. (This is entered on  
 the authority of the List of Contents of the  
*E.I.M.*, p. 272. It is presumed that Hugh Thom-  
 son made the drawing here engraved from some  
 earlier sketch or painting.)  
 85*a*. Feb. A Hundred Years Ago. By W. Benham.  
 86. April. A Country Sunday.\* (Days with Sir Roger de  
 Coverley.)  
 87. May. Sir Roger's Family.\* (Days with Sir Roger de  
 Coverley.)  
 88. June. Mr. Will Wimble.\* (Days with Sir Roger de  
 Coverley.)  
 89. July. The Picture Gallery.\* (Days with Sir Roger de  
 Coverley.)  
 90. Aug. The Widow.\* (Days with Sir Roger de Coverley.)  
 91. In Leicester Fields. By Austin Dobson.  
 92. Sept. Fashions in Hair. By Laurence Alma Tadema.  
 93. The Chase.\* (Days with Sir Roger de Coverley.)  
 94. Oct. The Spectator's Return to Town.\* (Days with Sir  
 Roger de Coverley.)  
 95. Dec. In the Heart of London. By Rev. D. Rice-Jones.  
 96. 1887. *E.I.M.* Feb. A Description of a Morning in London.\*  
 97. Apr.-June. A Journey to Exeter. By John Gay.\*  
 98. May. Stray Lines from an Angler's Pocket Book. By  
 Basil Field.  
 99. July. Old Hook and Crook. By Basil Field.  
 100. Aug. Captain (of Militia) Sir Dilberry Diddle.\*

101. 1887. *E.I.M.* Oct.-Dec. Coaching Days and Coaching Ways.\*  
By W. Outram Tristram.
102. 1888. *E.I.M.* Jan.-July. Coaching Days and Coaching Ways.\*  
By W. Outram Tristram.
103. Dec. The Angler's Song.\* By Izaak Walton.
104. 1889. *E.I.M.* Feb. Coridon's Song.\* In Izaak Walton's *Complete Angler*.
105. Apr. A Hunting We will Go.\* By Henry Fielding.
106. July. Who Liveth So Merry.\* From Thomas Ravenscroft's *Deuteromelia*, 1609.
107. Sept. Come Sweet Lass.\* From *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, 1699.
108. Nov. How Happy Could I Be With Either.\* By John Gay.
109. Dec. Oh! Dear! What Can the Matter Be?\*
110. *The Graphic*. The Moat House.\* By W. Outram Tristram.  
(This was reprinted under the title of "The King of Hearts", in 1894. See "The Dead Gallant", *supra*—No. 15.)
111. The Loves and Jealousies of Two Jolly Post-boys.  
(With text by the artist. In colour.)
112. 1890. *E.I.M.* Feb. A Whitechapel Street. By E. Dixon.
113. May. Some Board School Children. By James Runciman.
114. *The Art Journal*. Jan. Ballad on a Wedding. By Sir John Suckling. (See "The New Budget", 1895, No. 132 *infra*.)
115. *Pall Mall Budget*. Apr. Four Innocents Abroad. By Herbert Baker.
116. May. How to Become Wealthy. By Andrew Carnegie.
117. *Graphic*. Bank Holiday Sketches.
118. Christmas No. How Jacky Marlinspike Returned Home in time for Christmas Pudding. (With text by the artist. In colour.)
119. 1891. *E.I.M.* Jan. Cabs and their Drivers. By W. Outram Tristram.
120. Nov. Three Portraits of Milton. By [Archdeacon] F. W. Farrar.



121. 1891. *Graphic*. Christmas No. Mr. Jollyboy's Bachelor Party. (With text by the artist. In colour.)
122.       *Black and White*. Feb. 14. St. Valentine's Day. Poem by Warham St. Leger.
123. 1892. *E.I.M.* Jan. Village Life in the Olden Time. By Frederick Gale.
124.       *Graphic*. Sketches in the London County Courts.
125.       Christmas No. Red Herrings by Parcel Post. (In colour, from sketches by J. H. Roberts.)
126.       *Scribner's Magazine*. Apr. The Social Awakening of London. By Robert A. Woods.
127.       Aug. A Riverside Parish. By Walter Besant. (Not republished, drawings nearly all destroyed by fire.)
128. 1894. *Pears' Annual*. Christmas Scenes.
129. 1895. *Graphic*. Christmas No. Young Herchard. A Somersetshire Ballad. (In colour.)
130.       *Pears' Annual*. (A drawing.)
131.       *The Octopus*. (An Oxford Eights Week publication—23rd to 29th May.) May (No. 1). A Study. (A modern John Bull sort of angler standing at the stream side, conceived in the Izaak Walton spirit.)
132.       *The New Budget*. (No. 1.) Apr. 4. (Reprint of the illustrations to the text of Sir John Suckling's poem, **Ballad on a Wedding**. From the *Art Journal* of Jan. 1890.)
133. 1896. *Graphic*. Christmas No. A Coaching Idyll. Verses by Edmund Petley. (In colour.)
134.       *Pears' Annual*. The Christmas Coach (leaving London), and A Canter on the Heath. (In colour.)
135. 1897. *Daily Graphic*. Jan. 6. Self Caricature.
136.       *Pears' Annual*. A Tally-Ho Idyll. (Five large plates in colour.)
137.       *Graphic*. Apr. 17, Aug. 28. John Bull's Trip to the Continent. (In colour.)
138.       Christmas No. The Hollydale Hunt. Verses by Edmund Petley. (In colour.)
139. 1898. *Graphic*. Christmas No. Aunt Keziah's Elopement. Verses by Edmund Petley. (In colour.)

140. 1899. *Graphic*. The Vaudeville Gallery.
141. 1901. *Little Folks*. Mar. and Apr. The Witch and the Jewelled Eggs.\* By Mrs. M. H. Spielmann.
142. *Graphic*. Nov. 30. An Irish Horse Fair. By Stephen Gwynn. (In colour.)
143. 1903. *Little Folks*. Dec. The Little Picture Girl.\* By Mrs. M. H. Spielmann.
144. *Graphic*. Apr. 4. A Run of Luck. (In colour.)
145. Oct. 3. A Holiday in Switzerland. (With text from the artist's letters.)
146. 1904. *Graphic*. Christmas No. A Runaway Couple. By M. E. Francis. (In colour.) And
147. Tally Ho! By H. C. (In colour.)
148. 1905. *Graphic*. May 13, 20, 27. An Artist's Visit to Monte Carlo. (With text by the artist.)
- 148 a. Christmas No. How the Doctor took to Horse Racing. By D. Conyers. (In colour.)
149. 1906. *Pears' Annual*. Joyce Pleasantry. By George R. Sims.
150. *Pall Mall Magazine*. Mar. London at Prayer: A Poor Parish.\* By Charles Morley.
151. Dec. A Painful Dilemma.
152. 1907. *Graphic*. Mar. 2. A Southdown Highwayman. By Norman Innes. (Three sketches.)
153. June 22. Conufoge. (Four sketches.)
154. *Little Folks*. Christmas at the Court of King Jorum.\* By Mrs. M. H. Spielmann.
155. *Pall Mall Magazine*. London at Prayer: Nobody's Children\* (at Dr. Barnardo's). By Charles Morley.
156. Dec. An Old Fashioned Christmas. (In colour.)
157. 1908. *Pall Mall Magazine*. June. The Ins and Outs of Varsity Life. By a Cambridge Fresher. [By Hugh Thomson's son—John Thomson.]
158. Aug. Little Miss Smith.
- 158 a. London at Prayer: Sunday in a Settlement\* By Charles Morley.
159. 1909. *Pears' Annual*. Boots at the Holly Tree Inn. By Charles Dickens.

- 160. 1909. *Pall Mall Magazine*. Dec. Bank Farm.
- 161. 1911. *Pall Mall Magazine*. One of the Olden Time.
- 162. 1914. *Graphic*. Christmas No.
- 163. 1917. *Sphere*. Christmas No. The Muffin Man. With Verses by A. J.
- 164. *Chatterbox*. Four colour-plates. (Little or no reference to the text. In colour.)
- 165. 1919. *Graphic*. Christmas No. Our Village.
- 166. *Sphere*. Christmas No. The Diary of John Allen of Wapping. ("The Maidens of Wapping.")
- 167. 1921. *Sphere*. Nov. 28. Christmas No. Choosing the Satin. By the late Hugh Thomson. (Unsigned.)

## IV

MISCELLANEA: CONTRIBUTIONS TO OCCASIONAL PUBLICATIONS; BOOK-PLATES; CLUB MENU AND OTHER CARDS, ETC.

- 168. c. 1875. A Drawing to Illustrate a Joke. (In a boy's periodical.)
- 169. c. 1883. Box-cover designs from *Patience* and other of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, issued by Marcus Ward & Co. Pen-and-ink portrait of John Rea, a Belfast celebrity; later issued as a post card.
- 170. 1888. Illustrations for the programme of *The Pompadour* at the Haymarket Theatre. (Adaptation by W. G. Wills and S. Grundy of Brachvogel's play, *Narcissi*, produced 31st March 1888.)
- 171. 1891. *A Book of Drawings*. By A. Bryan . . . Louise Jopling . . . Hugh Thomson . . ., etc. With Prefatory Poem by Austin Dobson. (Privately printed for Mr. and Mrs. F. T. Davies. On p. 33 a black-and-white drawing by



Hugh Thomson, "At My Window", with quotation from Shakespeare (*L. L. Lost*), "A child of our grandmother Eve". . . . 100 large paper copies were printed.)

172. 1894. Scottish Provident Institution's Calendar.
173. 1900. Christmas Card, Coaching Scene, for Thomas J. Barratt.
174. 1905. Scottish Widows' Fund Calendar: Rugby Football. (In colour.)
175. 1906. Scottish Widows' Fund Calendar: Curling. (In colour.)
176. 1907. Boz Club. Dinner Booklet. Mr. Samuel Weller.
177. 1908. Titmarsh Club. Fourth Dinner Menu Card.
178. The Lady Swaythling's Musical Programme. (Two illustrated pages.)
179. 1909. Titmarsh Club. Sixth Dinner Menu Card.
180. *Press Album*. Pen and Ink Sketch.
181. 1910. Titmarsh Club. Ninth Dinner Menu Card.
182. 1912. Titmarsh Club. Twelfth Dinner Menu Card.
183. 1913. *The Odd Volume*. *From My Note Book*. (From H. T.'s Swiss Tour.)
184. Titmarsh Club Fifteenth Dinner Menu Card.
185. 1914. Six Writing-Pad Cover Designs for J. Castell & Co.
186. 1915. *The Blinded Soldiers' and Sailors' Gift Book: The Blinded Soldier*. (Coloured frontispiece.)
187. 1919. Diploma for the British Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Paris.
188. Six Writing-Pad Cover Designs for J. Castell & Co.
189. At various dates Book-plates for:
 

J. Comyns Carr.	Mrs. Carmichael Thomas.
(Canon) Alfred Ainger.	Dale Thomas.
Ernest Brown.	John Thomson.
William E. F. Macmillan.	

## V

## A SELECTION OF ARTICLES OR CRITICISMS ON HUGH THOMSON AND HIS WORK IN CURRENT LITERATURE

190. 1896. *The Bookbuyer*. April. (New York.) "Hugh Thomson." Anon.
191. 1897. *The Academy*. "Hugh Thomson." Anon.
192. 1901. *Great Thoughts*. Dec. By Raymond Blathwayt.
193. 1906. *Art Journal*. "Two Modern Book Illustrators: II. Hugh Thomson." By Austin Dobson.
194. 1913. *The Bookman*. "The Art of Hugh Thomson." By J. P. Collins.
195. 1917. *The Studio*. April. "Hugh Thomson, Illustrator." By Marion Hepworth Dixon.
196. 1920. *The National Review*. July. By Austin Dobson. (Criticism reprinted in "Later Essays", 1921.) (Milford, Oxford University Press.)
197. 1929. *Great Thoughts*. Sept. "A Trinity in Art: Sullivan, Gilbert, Hugh Thomson." By Bernard Page.

*Among the more Noteworthy Criticisms, in book form,  
of Hugh Thomson's work are the following:*

198. 1889. Joseph Pennell: "Pen Drawing and Pen Draughtsmen." (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)  
Same work, 3rd edition, speaking in ever-increasing approval and admiration.
199. 1892. Charles G. Harper: "English Pen Artists of Today". (Percival & Co.)  
P. G. Hamerton: "Drawing and Engraving". (Adam & Charles Black.)
200. 1895. Joseph Pennell: "Modern Illustration". (G. Bell & Sons.)
201. 1901. J. M. Bulloch: "Modern Pen Drawings: European and American". (Studio Office.)

202. 1903. R. E. D. Sketchley: "English Book Illustration of To-day". (Kegan Paul.)
203. 1908. Austin Dobson: "De Libris" ("Mr. Hugh Thomson", pp. 111-124); reprinted from the *Art Journal*, 1906. (See 193 *supra*.) (Macmillan & Co., Ltd.)
204. 1914. Malcolm C. Salaman: "Modern Book Illustration". (Studio Office.)
205. 1922. Lady (Leonard) Cohen: "Hugh Thomson". (In the "Bibliographical Catalogue of the First Loan Exhibition, First Edition Club, London, 1922". It consists of eight pages dealing with the books illustrated wholly or in part by Hugh Thomson. From this Collection formed by Lady Cohen four items only were at the time lacking, together with certain odd volumes.
206. 1927. The Dictionary of National Biography, 1912-1921. "Hugh Thomson (1860-1920)." By M. H. Spielmann.

## VI

AUTHORS WHOSE BOOKS WERE ILLUSTRATED BY  
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## EXHIBITIONS HELD OF HUGH THOMSON'S DRAWINGS

1887. The Fine Art Society.  
*Days with Sir Roger de Coverley* (60 drawings), *A Journey to Exeter* (17), *Morning in London* (9), *Sir Dilberry Diddle* (7); total 93.
1891. The Fine Art Society.  
*The Vicar of Wakefield* (101 drawings).
1893. The Fine Art Society.  
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1896. The Fine Art Society.  
 Various contributions to "A Century and a Half of English Humorous Art".
1897. The Fine Art Society.  
 I. Jane Austen: *Emma* (33), *Sense and Sensibility* (29), *Pride and Prejudice* (14). II. *The Story of Rosina* (14); total, 90.
1899. Birmingham and Midland Institute.  
 A selection of drawings lent by Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd.
1899. The Continental Gallery.  
 "England in the Time of our Grandmothers."
1899. The Continental Gallery.  
 "Social Scenes of English Country Life."
1900. The Continental Gallery.  
*Highways and Byways* series, etc.; tinted and black-and-white character drawings.
1900. Paris International Fine Art Exhibition.  
 Group of drawings. (Awarded *mention honorable*.)
1901. Leighton House.  
*Piper of Hamelin*. (Exhibition of Fairy and Folk Tale illustrations.)
1901. Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>1</sup>  
*Cranford*. (12 drawings. Loan Exhibition.)
1902. The Continental Gallery.  
*Peg Woffington* (67), *Irish Horse Fair (Graphic)* (4); total, 71.
1903. Newcastle-on-Tyne Academy of Arts.  
 Various drawings, 6.
1905. The Doré Gallery.  
*Evelina* (32), *A Kentucky Cardinal* (11), *The Graphic*, "Monte Carlo", etc. (4); total, 51.
1906. The Ulster Art Club.  
 Illustrations from various novels, *Highways and Byways* series, and 2 to *H.M.S. Pinafore*; total, 60.

<sup>1</sup> A varied selection of Hugh Thomson's drawings belongs to the Department of Engraving, Illustration, and Design in the Museum—acquired by gift and purchase.

1909. Walker's Gallery.  
*Scenes of Clerical Life* (10), *Silas Marner* (12), *Highways and Byways in Surrey* (10); total, 32 tinted drawings.
1910. The Leicester Galleries.  
*Merry Wives of Windsor* (24), *Esmond* (16), *As You Like It* (27); total, 67.
1911. The Rome International Fine Art Exhibition.  
 One drawing only: "Beatrix and Esmond", from *Esmond*.
1912. The Leicester Galleries.  
*The School for Scandal* (23).
1913. The Leicester Galleries.  
*Quality Street* (23), *She Stoops to Conquer* (5); total, 28.
1923. The Leicester Galleries.  
 MEMORIAL EXHIBITION. A Selection of 87 drawings from 25 books.
1923. The Folkestone Museum and Art Gallery Exhibition.  
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1931. The Victoria and Albert Museum.  
 Exhibition of English Humorous Artists. Examples from *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*.



The vignette to the Evelina Exhibition, 1905, is here adapted to Hugh Thomson's Memorial Exhibition at the Leicester Galleries, 1923



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Spielmann, Marion H.

Hugh Thomson, his art, his  
letters, his humor and his charm.

